

THE NAMELESS PLACES

BOOKS BY ERNEST RAYMOND

Novels:

A LONDON GALLERY *comprising*
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THE MARSH
GENTLE GREAVES
THE WITNESS OF CANON WELCOME
A CHORUS ENDING
THE KILBURN TALE
CHILD OF NORMAN'S END
FOR THEM THAT TRESPASS
WAS THERE LOVE ONCE?
THE CORPORAL OF THE GUARD
A SONG OF THE TIDE
THE CHALICE AND THE SWORD
TO THE WOOD NO MORE

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A FAMILY THAT WAS
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THE OLD TREE BLOSSOMED
DON JOHN'S MOUNTAIN HOME
THE FIVE SONS OF LE FABER
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THE NAMELESS PLACES

by
ERNEST RAYMOND



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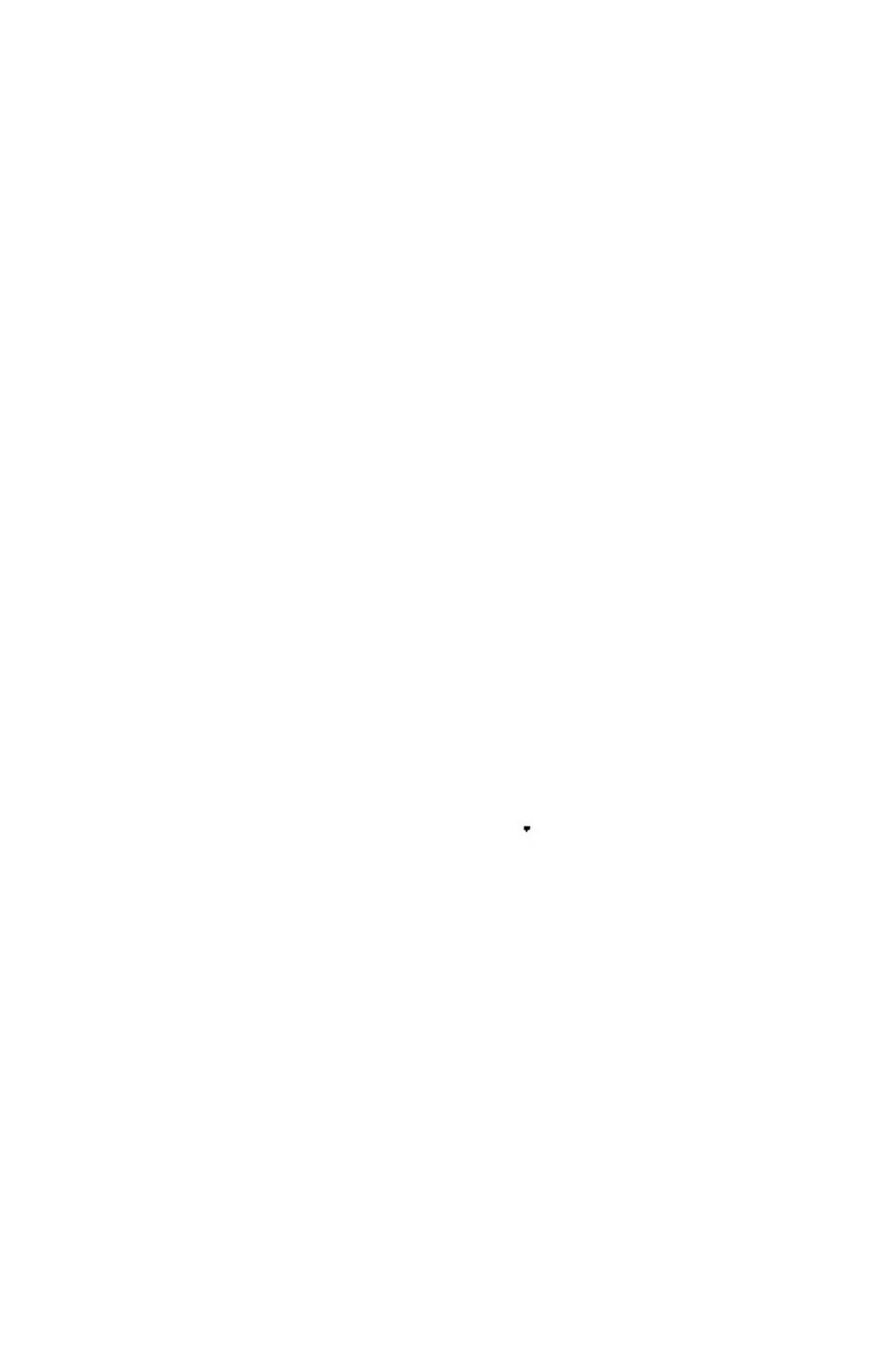
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by Ernest Raymond

FOR

PETER JOHN FRANCIS RAYMOND



PART I

RAIN for the third day. We stood at the wide window in our climbing kit and stared out at the mountains, sighing, defeated. At the mountains? Well, hardly, for their ridges and crests were lost in cloud and we could see only their lower slopes across the wet green fields of the valley. These flat alluvial meadows, spongy with rain and shadowed by cloud, were as deep and brilliant a green as I have ever seen, and the mountain-breasts challenged this green with the orange rust of their dead bracken and the slate grey of their loose boulders as they climbed into cloud.

There were five of us at the window, shrugging our shoulders in humorous despair, for we were all lovers of this mountainous region and must have our fun out of the beloved's weakness, which was to be the wettest corner of all our wet English island. We five made up the whole company in the Pavey Ark Hotel because it was early May and the visitors in the valley were few. The Easter climbers had gone; the Whitsun migrants had yet to come ; and the remnant in the valley were either such as had no tasks to return to or those who knew May to be the loveliest month in this Alpine corner and chose it for their holiday. For these real mountain lovers it was made the lovelier by the fact that, as often as not, thanks to the emptiness of the valleys, you could walk the long ridges or scramble to the summits and have all the dear desolation to yourselves.

But what am I saying ? May the loveliest month—and here is the third day's rain scourging the window panes, and a most detestable cold wind making a winter in this hotel bar! Still, let the statement stand. Let us only wait, and to-morrow the sun will be out on the hills again to accompany us in our climbs for weeks on end.

The Pavey Ark Hotel is a hotel for mountain lovers. It stands near the head of the valley and close to the great mountains of the Cumberland massif and the famous climbs. Here on the walls of the bar hang pictures of the grander peaks and the giddier climbs. Here is the Napes Needle with five of the Carlisle

Mountaineering Club crowded astride its narrow apex; here the darkly fissured and overpowering North Face of Scafell; and here the peaked saddle of Blencathra under snow. And of course, behind the bar counter, in the place of honour, is Pavey Ark itself, that fine precipice and stormy hummock among the Langdale Pikes. Beside it is a large panorama of this our valley, taken from on high, with the little white hotel in its centre and the feet of the mountains all around it.

The five of us at the bar window were Sir Robert Spellman, of Spellman, West and Company, the steamship owners, a big hearty man with dark hair rather long, who looked more like a portly comedy actor than a shipowner, and not in the least like a rock-climber, though he was an excellent one; Lady Spellman, his wife, who was a heavy lady now but quite trustworthy on the rope if, as she said, she had Sir Robert above her and another mighty man below; Sadie Spellman, their dark slim daughter who could slither up a rock face like a lizard; myself; and Dr. Edwyn Shelley.

Dr. Shelley was easily the most remarkable of us, the only one who looked at all strange in this mountaineers' saloon, the only one who was picturesque. He must have been seventy or thereabouts; his white hair was soft as floss, his nose was small in a round face ruddy with health, his eyes were blue and twinkling and very kind. The broad strong body was housed in an old white tennis shirt, a blue sleeveless sweater, and blue linen shorts—shorts because, as he explained, he was no rock climber but only a fell-walker and general ambler, rambler, and scrambler.

Save for the white soft hair his round face should have been quite undistinguished, but somehow distinction had been superimposed upon it by the old man's character; it lay in the quiet impassivity of the whole face, in the serene, shining intelligence of the eyes, which age was slowly withdrawing beneath the bushed white eyebrows, and in the humour which was allowed to gleam but momentarily in those eyes or visit for a broken second the unsmiling mouth. That smile was an indwelling smile, a shy tenant that never came quite the whole way to the window.

If ever I have looked upon a face that warranted the word 'noble', it was the face of Dr. Edwyn Shelley in the bar of the Pavey Ark.

He was a geologist, a Fellow of the Royal Society, and at

one time something exceedingly high in the British Museum. We looked him up in the hotel's ancient copy of *Who's Who* (ancient it might be but he'd long been in place there) and it recorded his journeys in search of extinct vertebrata in half a dozen countries; his medals, prizes, and doctorates which had been given him through the years, and his honorary membership of geological societies or scientific academies in France, Germany, America, Russia—even in China. His bare arms and bare knees suggested powerful limbs; perhaps their strength had been developed in heavy excavations among the strata of our Earth.

He was a widower now, and perhaps this unhealed sorrow increased his gentleness to all. Also his only son, who used to come with him to the mountains, had gone far away to a tea plantation in Assam, and the old man had to walk the mountains alone; an added loneliness that kept him kind.

I have called his face 'noble'; I might, I think, have used a stronger word. It seemed at times to have a saintliness about it; that infinite acceptance and forgiveness which is sometimes to be observed in those who have consecrated their days to science, and which can shame the rancours and heats of us unriper men. He looked more like a venerable clergyman than most venerable clergymen look, and this was not so odd, perhaps, because, even though he pronounced himself an agnostic, he believed in the extremes of Christian behaviour, which is more than some of our venerable clergymen do. He had even written, besides his pamphlets on palaeontology and fossils, a little book called *Religion of a Geologist*, which nobody read, he said, but in which he strove to show that Christian ethics did not need a revelation from beyond the stars to establish them on earth but could be evolved out of the spirit of man.

No doubt it was his impassive countenance, so calm, so unjudging, so trustworthy, which won him possession of the very secret story he told us this day in the Pavey Ark Hotel.

§

Sir Robert Spellman had just sighed at the window; sighed very heavily indeed. 'What are we to do?' he had asked of the clouded mountains. 'What, friends, do we do?'

At that instant Anna Suttle, the plump little waitress, passed

through the bar into the Lounge next door, carrying a bucket of firewood, logs and coal.

'It'll mebbe be a bit cauld fer ye ladies and gentlemen,' she said. 'I'll light a fire fer ye in Lounge.'

'That's right, Anna dear,' said the cheery Sir Robert. 'Good girl, Anna. Pile it high.'

'And we'll sit round the fire while someone tells us a story, Anna,' I said.

'Aye, sir,' Anna assented, and passed out with her load. And 'Yes, oh yes!' cried Sadie Spellman, girlishly springing up and down on her toes.

'Who has a story?' I asked, pleased with the success of my careless suggestion.

'There's only one person here to tell us a story,' said Sir Robert, 'and that's Dr. Shelley; because he has a most astonishing one. What about that extraordinary story, Shelley, which you told me in this very place some years ago? I tried to tell it afterwards to my wife, when I got home, but I couldn't remember most of it. I know there was a ghost in it and a murderer; and you met 'em both.'

'Oh, yes,' exclaimed Lady Spellman. 'A rather terrible story.'

'I didn't know the half of it then,' said Dr. Shelley. 'It's only in the last year or two that I've known the full truth of it.'

'But what is all this?' demanded Sadie, clasping her hands and prancing again. 'I've never heard anything of this.'

'He's a man who see ghosts, my dear,' said her father.

'Only once, Miss Sadie,' the doctor corrected, 'and whether ghosts is the word I don't know. Sometimes I think of them as figures seen in a waking dream—a moment of hypnosis when another man's agonized thoughts were mysteriously thrown upon my brain, so that I saw them with my eyes.'

Sir Robert smiled at his daughter. 'That's what he says, Sadie. And he doesn't look a liar, does he?'

'Oh, but tell us, *tell* us!' Sadie pleaded.

And be sure I supported her.

'No, no; it's too long,' demurred the doctor. 'If I were to do it justice it would take all day.'

'Well, what matter?' Sir Robert pointed at the mountains. 'Look at those clouds. The wind's in the south-west, and as long as it blows from that quarter, it'll rain and rain and rain. The longer your tale the better.'

'But there are parts of it,' objected the doctor with his faint unfinished smile, 'which are hardly suited to the young lady.'

'Of all the rubbish!' pouted this beautiful but arch young creature. 'Nothing's unsuitable for Sadie.'

'I agree with that,' said her father. 'After some of the stories she's told me. And some of the rhymes.'

'But then there's her dear mother.'

'Ha! That's good, Margaret! He thinks he can shock you. Why, my dear sir, Margaret's far tougher than I am. She can take things that shake me. If you could see her shinning up Slingsby's Chimney, you'd know she can negotiate any tale of yours.'

'Yes, yes!' endorsed her daughter. 'And so can Sadie. Sadie has climbed Slingsby's Chimney too.'

'Very well, children,' agreed Dr. Shelley.

I must tell you that Dr. Shelley's talk, urbane as a rule, and ironic, and even cynical at times, could at other times be rather sportive, as if he were a patriarch in the chimney corner, telling children a bed-time tale. Then he might address us as 'my children' or 'mes enfants', but it was all too happy and kindly to displease. Towards the two ladies he showed an exceedingly old-fashioned gallantry, especially towards Sadie because she was beautiful and young. Sadie accordingly dubbed him 'a museum piece', but delighted in him.

'Come then; it's settled.' Sir Robert put his finger on Dr. Shelley's bare elbow to pilot him into the Lounge.

'It's not a cheerful story,' persisted the doctor. 'It's a brutal tale in many ways; and as I shall always think, a very sad one.'

'So much the better.' Sir Robert guided the doctor through the door that led into the Lounge. And we all followed after them. We passed out of the bar into a very different room, a bright chamber all cretonne curtains and covers and soft rugs and cushions. The pictures here were still of the mountains and the becks, but they were water-colours in gilt frames. Anna's fire was now flaring and flaming, and spitting and sparkling, within its proscenium arch of Honister green slate, and we pulled sofas and chairs around it. The rain hammered on the windows as if angry at our sudden contempt of it.

'Now then, Shelley,' commanded Sir Robert, leaning back and interlacing his fingers under his chin.

Sadie Spellman, in the depths of the deepest chair, had drawn the long taper of her legs under her like the tail of a

mermaid. Lady Spellman was seated on the same chair's arm, with her hand lightly smoothing the mermaid's hair. Dr. Shelley, sitting erect in the corner of a settee, folded his stout arms across his broad breast and began.

His voice was quiet; almost solemn.

§

About one part of this story (he began) I shall never know what to think. Sir Robert has spoken of a ghost. Well, whether this most vivid apparition—or, indeed, apparitions—which I encountered in the Inlands valley over yonder had any real substance I cannot say. Perhaps it was that for one brief moment of my life I became clairvoyant. All I know is that nothing of this nature had ever happened to me before in more than sixty years, and nothing similar has ever happened since. That some kind of clairvoyance is occasionally possible to men I hold it unscientific to deny; there is too enormous a weight of worthy evidence in favour of it.

But there! the ghost, or ghosts, are a very small part of the story. And now let us come to it.

A year or two ago—I won't say when—having recently retired from the Museum, at a later age than usual, I was treating myself, as had always been my intention, to a stay of some months in this valley—to a whole summer, in fact, of climbing mountains, which, you will agree, is the perfect form of rest. And one afternoon I climbed the pony track to the long ridge between Borran Moor and Slape. It is so pleasant a ridge, a turf walk most of its length, with our valley on one side of it and the charming Inlands valley on the other, that I have always thought it should have a name of its own. But it has no name on the maps. So I christened it long ago the Innominate Ridge. An old hand like you, Miss Sadie, will know that the pioneers of Alpine climbing used to give some such appellation to strange peaks they had yet to conquer, it being bad form to name a mountain before you had scaled it. Often the name remained even though the climbers had long ago stood on its top and added its scalp to their belts. There is the Aiguille Sans Nom on the French side of Mont Blanc and the Innominata on the Italian side. Well, the lively fellows brought the practice to our home mountains, so that we have the Innominate Tarn above Scarf Gap and the Innominate Crack on Kern Knotts. I

understand that you and your astonishing parents, Miss Sadie, have climbed the Innominate, even though it is graded as a Very Severe.

More humbly, I clambered, somewhat breathless, to my Innominate Ridge and sat down at a point where the whole Inlands Valley became visible. And then it was that I saw a man coming up the track from Inlands. No other figure was anywhere in sight. It was May like today (only glorious with sun) and the mountains were deserted. Everything, the whole sweep of mountains and valley, was still. Even down in Inlands the ewes and their lambs seemed motionless on their pastures. The white-blossoming may-trees on the lower slopes looked like sheep at pasture too; and, if it comes to that, the great brown headlands, with their noses down to the floor of the valley, might have been giant beasts grazing.

I waited for that solitary climber to come abreast of me. He came, a grey-haired man in his late forties, and I was immediately struck by the handsomeness of his face. In body he was perhaps too short and stocky, like me; his chest was thick, and his shoulders wide and heavy, but his face, I tell you, was like something out of an illustrated scripture book. It would have served, let us say, for Joseph of Arimathea. Or for Pilate. Yes, Pilate, I think, with that shortish but potent Roman figure and those classical features. One could imagine him seated in a Pretorium with the folds of his toga around him and one thick shoulder exposed. His grey hair was parted in the middle to swell out over the ears, and I judged from his eyebrows that the hair had once been black; all the features were cameo-cut, and the eyes, under the thick drooping eyebrows, were remarkable: black, penetrating eyes with lids that slanted down over them like blinds that hang askew above the windows. The shaven mouth was thin-lipped, even sternly so—the lips of an unyielding man. It is difficult to define the impression I got as he stopped and smiled down at me. I can only say it was an impression of power softened by sadness. I wrote him down on the tablets of my memory as a powerful, grey and sombre man.

We mentioned the fineness of the day and asked each other where we were going to. He said he proposed to walk over Borran Moor to Great Head and Greenlaw and so down again into the Inlands valley. A man's trek, that! I spoke of a more modest achievement: down into Inlands and up to the top of Blea Dod and home again.

Now, before our eyes at the head of the Inlands valley was the splendid North Face of Great Barrock rearing up over its foothills like a breaking wave. I said, 'Again and again I've tried to climb Great Barrock but always it's proved just too far for me. I've tried to approach it by Great Head and up the side of High Scale, but always I've had to turn back if I wanted my dinner.'

He looked at the up-rearing mountain. 'That's because you've missed the easiest route. I've climbed it many a time.'

'But which is the easiest route?'

'Look.' He pointed down into the heart of Inlands. 'You see the little church behind its sycamores.'

'I can't see from here that they are sycamores.'

He took no notice of this. 'And you see the white road climbing slowly up to that house among its larches and pines—the last house of all.'

'Yes.'

'Well, that is High Scoat Farm, and the green slope up to it is Broad Tunge—well named, because it's just like a tongue stretched out on the valley.'

I nodded.

'And above High Scoat Farm do you see the long green ridge leading straight as honesty to the very breast of Great Barrock?'

'I do, sir.'

'That is High Scoat Bank. At its end is a pleasant scramble up an outcrop of rock and then you are on turf and stones again and can just walk on to the crown.'

All this sounds fluent enough, but all the time I had an odd feeling that he half wanted to talk to a stranger and half wanted to escape into himself again and be alone.

'But why in pity have I never thought of that rout?' I asked.

'Because none of the visitors to these parts seem ever to enter Inlands. They pour into your valley down there, and they fill the inns of Breckenwater just over the pass but never do they come into Inlands. It's the unvisited valley. You won't see any cottage window advertising teas or soft drinks. There are climbs on our Hanging Crags, but they are mostly Very Severes or Severes, and for some reason no one ever seems to come near them.'

'How right you are, sir. I've been coming here for more

years than I care to remember and I've never walked in Inlands yet. I've only passed by the old mill on its beck.'

'Yes, that's as far as they ever get. Curious, isn't it; because it's a vale full of beauties.'

'It certainly is,' I agreed.

And, he standing, I seated, we looked down upon Inlands. Its dry-walled fields lay like a green crazy pavement, and their brilliant green made a sharp contrast with the rust-red of the bracken where all cultivation ceased and with the sober tints of the empty mountain tops. Even as we looked a cloud crossed over the sun, and instantly the fields turned a yet deeper green, the bracken changed to crimson, and the tops went black. All the contrasts were heightened and all the light seemed sharper, as if one looked through dark glasses at the valley and at the desolate hills that go storming around it.

Quickly the sun unveiled its face, and all the first colours swung into place again. The stranger extended the hand of a lover towards these transformations and with a farewell smile went his way.

I felt he was relieved to turn into himself again and be alone.

§

The next day was as bright as ever, and I set out to make the ascent of Barrock by the route he had recommended. I went up Slape again and down into Inlands and along the road as far as the tiny church in its walled garden of trees and tombs. He was right: the trees were sycamores. He was right also in saying that no fell-walkers or rock-climbers were to be met within Inlands. Farmers I saw, and a shepherd, and a farmer's wife, but never a lad like Sir Robert or a lass like Miss Sadie with rucksack slung and map in hand. From the chapel the road became little more than a cart-track leading up to High Scoat Farm, the last and highest steading in the valley. It was a tiring road to the feet, all loose granite flints, but it was beautiful to the eye on a sunny May morning. On either side a broken and tangled hedge screened the tilted pastures, and at my right a runnel of ale-brown water went tumbling and glinting over the stones. It went happily down while I went toiling up. It never stopped in its laughing journey, but I did often. I stopped to recover breath and consider the flowers in the hedge-bank. They were all there, all those that I should have expected to find: celandine

and wood violet, speedwell and primrose, bugloss and wild chervil and, dearest of all, the tiny yellow tormentil. (Forgive me, Miss Sadie: as a botanist I am a bore.)

So I came to High Scoat Farm. The road passed right in front of its porched doorway. I looked at it as I went by. It was a large house with a barn at one side and a newly built garage, splendidly equipped, at the other. Through the open doors of this garage I saw a far finer car than any Cumbrian hill-farmer could afford, far finer than most men could afford, and I wondered. . . . The house, its rough stone walls lately whitewashed, was spotlessly clean, from doorstone to dormer windows, but so are all houses in these Cumbrian valleys.

The road ran a little further among the trees about the house (larches and pines, as the man had said) and then petered out on the turf shoulder of High Scoat Bank. Yes, it was true: this long ridge led straight to that steep rocky outcrop which gives such a splendid frown to the face of Great Barrock. I ate my sandwiches on the top of Barrock that day, and came home the way I went. That is to say I came back into the trees about High Scoat Farm. And here I had my first surprise.

In the rough and tree-darkened garden, stretching and falling beyond the wall of the garage, I saw my stranger of yesterday talking like the house's master to a weather-worn old chap with the rounded back and the bowed legs of a heavy worker. I say 'old' because his hair was grizzled and his skin wrinkled and his back rounded, but I'm afraid he was a year or so younger than I am now. I halted so that neither might see me. This because I could not understand why my friend, when pointing to this house yesterday, had not mentioned that it was his own, and I felt that he would be as uncomfortable about this concealment as I certainly was. So I stood quite still, and their words came to me.

'What are we to do about it, Daniel?' my friend was saying in pleasant, half-laughing tones. 'One must sleep.'

'Aye, it's t'new dog dahn at Low Scoat theer,' his companion answered. 'A reet owd chanter he is. Sings all night fra dark to dawn. And starts all t'others oop. Whether he can smell divils abaht as soon as sun goes dahn Ah doan't knoa. Wheer Ah coom from they say as a dog hah'lin' is a sure sign o' ill luk.'

'Ill luck it certainly is if it murders your sleep. I could cheerfully murder the beast.'

' Well, no blasted tyke ivver kep me awake aboov a minute and three quarters. Ah reyther like to hear a dog barkin', meseln. It's kind of friendly in t'lonesomeness of the night.'

' Better to sleep and be done with the lonesomeness.'

' Mebbe, but for my part Ah'd reyther have a hah'lin' tyke nor a whistlin' woman ony day. As they say at 'oam, a whistlin' woman's worse nor a crowin' hen. Neether's natural. Damn it, if Ah didn't meet one coomin' oop valley this mornin'. It was t'lass from Green Pike Inn. Fair whistlin' her silly head off she wur—mucky little toad! It's not natural and may bring ill luck or even a death to some one at this end of valley. Let's hope it's some'un dahri at Low Scoat, and not me or Maisie or you.'

' Or best of all the dog,' laughed my friend. ' I did think that here of all places, with mountains all around us, shutting out the world, we should find a little quiet and some sleep. Couldn't you accidentally shoot the beast? Or dump a little rat poison within reach of his chain? '

' It's ill luk to shoot a dog, they say. It may coom back and hah'l at yer on All Souls' Neet and similar suitable occasions.'

' I'd risk that inconvenience if it were the price of a night's sleep.'

' Aye, you've allus bin a poor sleeper, Ah know. Tha was sleepin' bad, if tha remembers, ha, ha, ha, way back in t'owd Salvation Army hostel in t'Mile End Road. Eh, Martin lad? And that wur nigh on thirty years ago. But there were good reason why you didn't sleep so well in them days: do you mind them mattresses and the stink and all the old gaffers in t'room snorin' their lousy heads off, or gettin' oop ten times a night for a pee? Ah reckon we both sleep a bit softer now, eh, Martin lad? Aye, we do that an' all, ha, ha, ha. And Maisie too.'

They were now going down the slope of the garden, so I heard no more. In no danger of being seen now, I walked quickly past the house and down that road by the runnel. All the way I was wondering about those strange last words. The Mile End Road thirty years ago, and this man and this Daniel together there, and hard lying for both of them then.

§

At the mouth of the valley, where the narrow Inlands road comes shyly out of the trees to join the wide high road, there's the Green Pike Inn. You must have passed it often, a long low

block, built of grey Skiddaw slates, that looks like a row of cottages sitting under the grassy slopes of Green Pike. It is a guest house, so you can see that directly we come out of Inlands we are back again in the world of motorists and fell-walkers. I was tired and thirsty after my climb in the sun and I went into its tap-room for a pint. There was only one other drinker in that little bar, which was just as well, because it was so small that, what with its settle and table, two or three would have been a tight fit and four a multitude. The casks stood ranged behind a serving hatch which provided the only semblance of a bar counter. Through this aperture a comely, fresh-faced young woman passed me a foaming mug, and very pleasant she looked, framed in the old black wood of the hatch. Perhaps she was the landlord's young wife, or his daughter. And was she, I wondered, the lass who went whistling up the vale, to the grave alarm of Daniel at High Scoat.

I opened a chat with her because I had a mind to learn more about Daniel and his master.

'I've just come down from Great Barrock,' I said.

'You have? Well, I never! Why anyone climbs mountains if they haven't got to, I never understand. I've never climbed one yet. The very sight of them makes my legs ache.'

'Just climb one to the very top, my dear young lady,' I advised, 'and you'll understand for ever more.'

'Will I?' She put her head coyly on one side, fixed saucily mischievous eyes on me, and rested her arms on the counter; and I knew directly that she was one of those misses who must set about fascinating any man, even if he's a useless old codger like me. 'Which shall I start on?'

'Why not Great Barrock?'

'Oh, law no! It's far too high.'

'My dear child, if anyone as decrepit as I can do it, you could romp up it. You've only got to go into Inlands and past High Scoat Farm—'

But at the name High Scoat Farm a keener interest gleamed in her eyes. 'Did you go that way?' she interrupted.

'I did.'

'And did you by any chance see the gentleman that now owns High Scoat?'

Nothing could be better: we were on the target already. 'I saw an exceedingly good-looking gentleman in the garden talking to a grey kind of labouring chap who seemed to be a Yorkshireman.'

'Ah, that'd be Daniel Deakin. He was a weaver once in Bradford or somewhere. And the gentleman must have been Mr. Herriot, because there's no other man in that house, only Daniel's wife.'

'Herriot, did you say?'

'Yes, Mr. Martin Herriot, his name is.'

'Is he not married?'

'No. He's never been married, I don't think. He's married to the mountains, *we* say.'

'And what's Daniel Deakin in the house?'

'That's what we'd all like to know. He and Mrs. Deakin look after Mr. Herriot, but he's certainly not a servant. More a friend, like. Which is funny, because Mr. Herriot's obviously a gentleman, and Daniel's a pretty rough sort o' chap. Mr. Herriot's a millionaire, they say. That's so, isn't it, Charley?'

This was addressed to the man on the settle, so I turned my eyes towards him. He was a young shepherd, I felt sure: his cap was on the back of his head; his face was wind-browned; his heavy, nailed boots still had the fell-grass about them and smelt of the midden in his yard. He answered in broad Cumbrian. 'Aye, if Ah had what he's gitten Ah wadn't be heer wheer nowt nivver happens. Aye, a funny lot they are, oop at High Scoat. Can't mek ony of 'em out. Yon Herriot's got aw t'brass he needs an' plenty mair, but theer's nobbut they three up theer, hissell and yon Daniel and his missus.'

'Is Mr. Herriot a farmer?'

'No yan knaws what he is. He don't belong like us—nay, he don't rightly belong Inlands. Jim Vigod works t'farm fer him, such as it is, but sheep farmin's goin' till t'dogs, maistly.'

'Is one man enough there?'

'Aye, it's nut a large farm: aboot fifty acres of inside land, gey little on it ploughed. Aw t'rest is rough grazin' on t'fells. T'sheep are oop theer maist o' the year, except in lambing time.'

'And Mr. Herriot? Tell me more about him.'

'Ah knew gey little aboot him. He wur a girt man in Lunnon, they say, worth millions. But what! Ye'll 'eer mair silly talk in Inlands than onywheer else, Ah'm thinkin'. Nay, there's no end to t'daft tales they'll tell yance they git startit. They ken mair aboot him ner he kens hissell . . . And nut in Inlands only. Ye mun gang to t'King's Head on market day if ye want to heer aw aboot Mr. Herriot. But Ah doot it's aw a lot o' blether.'

'He came about three years ago,' the young woman put in,

'and Daniel Deakin and Mrs. Deakin came with him. Daniel comes in here sometimes and, according to his tales, Mr. Herriot has given thousands and thousands away in his time; but old Daniel's such a champion liar we none of us know what to believe.'

'Aye, Ah doot it's aw a lot o' blether, mesell. Yon Daniel's talk's as big as Barrock itsell—and as long, just aboot—but maist o' t'time he's winkin' at us.'

'He declares,' continued the girl, 'that Mr. Herriot sold his business in London—some sort of art-dealing business it was—for something like a million. And he makes out that Mr. Herriot was familiar with queens and dukes and ambassadors to whom he sold famous pictures for forty or fifty thousand pounds. It all sounds rather tall to me.'

Herriot? The name was coming back; vaguely I remembered it. I should have known about him, because he used to figure in the news once, but a geologist knows little about Art and is not interested in Commerce. Would the name have conveyed anything to you, Sir Robert? Only very vaguely? I thought so. And Miss Sadie is far too young. It's ten years since anyone heard his name, and he is quite forgotten.

'Why did he give it all up?' I asked of the shepherd and the girl.

'Who knows?' answered she. 'It seems that all of a sudden he got sick of everything and came to live in that very lonely house up there.'

'A misanthrope?' I suggested.

'Yes,' she said, but of course she didn't know what I meant. 'He gives me the impression of someone who half wants to talk to you and be friendly and half wants to get away from you and be alone.'

This was so exactly my impression that I nodded assent. 'I know what you mean.'

'He'll come in here sometimes and speak very civilly, but as sure as other chaps come in he gets up as soon as he politely can, and gives me a nice smile, and goes out. Most of the time he spends walking quite alone. The chaps say they see him walking against the sky along the ridges or they come across him sitting on a boulder and looking down at half of Cumberland. He's always ready to exchange a word or two with them, but never very many. He never seems comfortable with them. That's right, isn't it, Charley?'

'Aye, he don't talk till people much, unless it's t'bairns. He seames happy wi' them. Wi' us chaps he nivver says owt much about nowt.'

'I've seen him myself from these windows plodding along on Green Pike or Cam Stickle, ever so high. I always know jt must be him because it's after the visitors have gone. Once I was in Low Scoat Farm where I have a friend, and there was such a storm-wind tearing down from Great Head that I just had to stay inside and wait for it to drop. We stood at the window watching this gale pick up the shingle from the Old Scoat slag-banks and drive it down the valley like so much hail or bullets. And while we watched he went by with his head down, beating up against the bombardment, as if he liked it. You'd've thought he enjoyed being stoned, because that was what it amounted to.'

'Like the first martyr, Stephen,' I said; which was not very clever because nobody knew what I was talking about, and there fell a sudden silence in the bar like the silence that once fell in heaven.

'Aye, he cares nowt fer t'fell winds,' said the shepherd at last.
'Seames to luv 'em.'

'And fancy shrinking away from nice people like us and preferring the old wind,' pouted the girl.

'Aye, it's queerly,' said the shepherd.

'And where could he have been going?' asked the girl rhetorically. 'There's nothing beyond Low Scoat except that terrible upper end of Inlands which always gives me the creeps, it's so narrow and shut-in and silent.'

'He could git on to Great Head by theer, but it's a cruel daft thing to do just fer pleasure. Eh well, he's queer i' some ways, Ah reckon; but what I says is——' —here the young man rose and put his mug on the counter—' theer's mair queer folk come oot o' Lunnon ner onywhere else on earth. Ah think it's likely t'smoke and t'din meks 'em queer. Ah mun ga noo. Ye wadn't mebbe like another, mester? Will ye hev yan wi' me?'

I declined with thanks, and he went with his heavy booted tramp out into the evening. The faint smell of the midden went out with him. I must leave too if I was to get back to the Pavey Ark for dinner, so I rose and offered the young lady a parting drink but she refused it, putting her head prettily on one side. Then I too went out.

§

The next day it was raining even more heavily than it is today, and I was held indoors, as we are. But just after lunch the sun scattered all the clouds to the very rims of Heaven and just stood up there, high above Honister, summoning us all to come forth. It was late for a long trek so I climbed Slape again and went down into the valley beyond. Fascinated by all that the shepherd and girl had told me, I was puerile enough to want to walk past that house again and glance furtively through its door or windows. I rather hoped I might meet and talk with the man Herriot. Nothing of interest happened till I was again on the cart-road leading up to his house. I must tell you here, for what it is worth, that I was very tired and sleepy that afternoon. You can believe it or not, but I am so abominably subject to suggestion that Herriot's talk about 'not sleeping because of a dog's barks' had ruined my sleep the night before, sentencing me to lie and listen to sheep bleating and dogs barking and cocks crowing and the bird-chorus at dawn. So in my weariness I halted often on the rough path, standing to look at the flowers under the hedge or at the little runnel scampering over its stones. And at one time I stood remarking the fact that water which had been ale-brown yesterday was a shining green today, where it reflected the young leaves in the sun. Abstracted, dreaming, I looked up from it and saw Herriot's dormer-windowed roof among his pines. This turned my dreamy thoughts to him, and in the same moment I saw, to my surprise, that I was no longer alone on the path.

A young woman was walking ahead of me. As she was in a light cotton frock printed with a pattern of flowers, I guessed she was no fell-walker but someone going up to the farm. I confirmed this guess by a glance at her footwear: she was wearing light, white, high-heeled shoes. At first I thought she might be the young woman from the inn, but then I saw that she was too tall, too slender, and too fair. Difficult to believe she could be Mrs. Daniel Deakin: she seemed much too young, graceful and ladylike to be wife to that creased old customer. Her hair was of that charming mixture when a lightish brown is shot with stripes and blazes of gold. At places the gold was pale enough to make the brown look dark. Could she be Herriot's wife? But no: he was unmarried. I did what we all do: glanced at her left hand. No wedding ring there. His mistress? A wealthy man's plaything? But then I remembered the sparkling, mischievous eyes of the lady of the inn, and I was sure that she would

not only have known of anything so piquant as a mistress but would have straightway apprised me of it.

I quickened my step to have a better look at her. Is there any harm in being as interested in a beautiful face as in a yellow tormentil under the hedge or in the diamond lights of a little stream? If so, then I am the chief of sinners. I walked past her and, when I was twenty strides in front, looked round. Ladies, I simply do not exaggerate when I say she was staggeringly beautiful. I felt grateful to that little steep lane for having provided a sight so pleasing. As you will see later, there may have been a good reason why she should have looked particularly beautiful that day. Her eyes, blue as you would have expected from those flashes of gold in the hair, were set wide apart, and they seemed the bluer for the sun-brown tint in the fair skin. Her nose was the straightest thing I've seen outside a sculpture. Cheeks and chin were rounder than you would have expected from one so tall. She might have been thirty, but her skin still had the texture of a child's.

She was staring in front of her, and it seemed she was too abstracted to see me or that she was quite uninterested in anyone in her path. I could not stare rudely at her so I bent down and picked, of all things, a dandelion, and only came erect just as she passed before me. It was then that I saw a very great sadness in her face, and I could almost vow that for a second she looked at me with sad appeal—but I may be imagining this after the event. Once she had passed me she never turned round and looked back. I followed quite a distance behind because I did not want to be seen by Deakin or Herriot, or whoever came to the door to greet her. When she was on the open space in front of the house, a cock chaffinch, disturbed by my steps, flew with a flash of white into a solitary ash-tree, and I cast up my eyes to see where he alighted. When I brought them down again the woman was gone, and I had no doubt she had gone into the house.

A niece of the man Martin Herriot? Visiting him in his hermitage? Herriot, I have said, was an uncommonly good-looking man; perhaps his sister was too, and this, his sister's daughter.

In my own time I walked past the house and through the trees and on to the slope of High Scoat Bank. There was no sound in the house; no sound of a young woman's voice talking happily or sadly to its inmates; the only sounds about me were

the continuing ruffled whisper of the rill, the tedious iteration of a cuckoo far away, and the voice of a shepherd calling to his dogs on the hill.

I sat there for a while in the genial sun and then, as the day declined, came down again and passed the farmhouse. Its door was open and, since it led straight into the kitchen, I was able to see Daniel Deakin and his wife, a plump little woman much younger than he, taking their tea at the kitchen table. The next window but one looked into a sitting room, and I could not resist sending a quick glance through it. I saw Herriot there alone, sitting with his elbows on his knees, his hands clasping a pipe-bowl, and his head bent as if weighted with thought.

§

It may be that too much solitude is not good for a man, but it is certain that, having no one to talk to on my walks that long holiday, I allowed myself to be oddly attracted by those people in High Scoat Farm. Like a child I indulged in playful or fanciful wonderings about them. And there were perhaps other and more respectable reasons why, two days later, I was back in their valley. I had become interested in the geology and vegetation of the mountains which cradled it. It lay so obviously within the Skiddaw slate, a rock which lends itself, because it is soft and splintery, to the bold smooth outlines of Barrock and Borran and Green Pike. The vegetation was characteristic too: a riot of bracken and fern and bilberry on the soft green turf with clumps of woodland far below, where the soil had been fertilized by the humus washed down from above. And again: as a lover of quiet and Man's absence, I had grown fond of this unvisited valley, so free from sportsmen's cars and campers' tents and noisy girl-climbers—oh, but forgive me, Miss S..die.

Anyway, here I was, once again walking up the cart-road from the tiny church towards the farm. I admit that, when I was on that path, my thoughts were less geological than anthropological: I kept thinking of that beautiful young woman and encouraging a hope that I would see her round the next bend. I did not see her, but when I was within a hundred steps of the house, I saw a girl child in front of me, dancing and skipping towards the house, as if it belonged to her. This was something quite unexpected. She could hardly be a child from one of the farms carrying a message to Mr. Herriot or Mr. Deakin because

she was wearing a school uniform that savoured not at all of the little schoolroom by the church but of some High School in a city. She was wearing what I believe you call, Miss Sadie, a 'gym slip': it was brown and tied with a bow at the waist. The blouse within it was light blue and the stockings below it light brown. She seemed about thirteen with her long boyish legs and slim boyish figure. In her hand, boy-like, she was swinging in sheer happiness a chestnut on a string, which was strange for this time of the year. It was what little London boys call a 'conker' and was apparently one of last year's harvest.

Because she dawdled often to stand and swish this conker around her hips as if chastising herself, the space between us diminished and I now saw with much interest that her hair, tied at the nape with a yellow bow, was exactly the same as that of the young woman I'd seen on this path before: it was brown that changed with sharp contrasts into gold. It looked all the browner and golder for lying on that brown uniform and under its yellow bow. It was so exactly like the woman's hair that I concluded she must be her daughter—though it was difficult to suppose the woman old enough to mother a child of thirteen. And that lack of a wedding ring!

Exceedingly curious now, I walked faster so as to see the child's face, and when I did so, I saw, almost with a shock, that her features were identical with those of the woman: the same eyes wide set, the same nose, round cheek, and round chin. Never had I seen a child who so perfectly reproduced features which I had looked on but two days before. It seemed certain now that she must be the woman's daughter. But the woman's youth? And that virgin finger of her left hand?

The child, lost in her own play, did not seem even to hear my footsteps. She continued swinging her chestnut, sometimes with an overarm action like a bowler at cricket, and walked on towards the house. When she reached the road before its doorway she stopped and turned her back on the house. And there she stood, now swinging the chestnut back and forth like a censer, while she gazed before her. What she was gazing at I could not imagine, because there was nothing in front of her but the high tangled hedge. Staring, was she, at her dreams?

This time I heard voices behind the doorway—clearly Mr. and Mrs. Deakin's in converse in the kitchen—so, having become, as you will have noticed, somewhat furtive in this dubious game

of spying, I went very quickly past the child and through the sheltering pines on to High Scoat Bank. But here I stopped abruptly, for there, reclining on the steep bank, and gazing with absent eyes across the valley while his fingers clasped his pipe-bowl, was Herriot.

Here was another of them apparently staring at his dreams.

He started at my footstep and sprang up into a seated posture, as if caught in a guilty act. I even thought that his face blanched under its mountain tan. But instantly he laughed away his alarm. ‘Good gracious! How you made me start! I was far away. Far away in place, and farther away in time.’

I apologized for breaking in upon his reverie, but he waved the apology aside. ‘Where was it we met?’ he asked, as he clambered to his feet. ‘Ah, I remember. At the top of the pony track where it goes over the ridge to Birkershaw.’

‘Yes,’ I said. This was the first time we had stood opposite each other, and I learned that, though I am not tall, I was an inch or two taller than he. And I remember thinking that a man with that splendid face should have been taller. His face was aristocratic; his broad torso not. ‘Yes, and if you remember, you told me that this was the best approach to Great Barrock.’

‘And are you about to climb it now?’

‘No, I climbed it the other day. I am merely considering the geology of your valley.’

‘Then come and consider my sitting room. This is my home, you know.’ After that moment of shock his charm of manner, which I’d noticed on the ridge, was in place again. ‘If you have come from Birkershaw you must be ready for a rest and a drink.’

‘I’ve come from much farther than Birkershaw.’

‘Then there can be no question about it.’ He put guiding fingers on my elbow, and we walked through the trees.

‘You mentioned this house,’ I reminded him, ‘but you never so much as hinted that it was your home.’

‘Of what interest could that be to anyone?’

‘You have lived here long?’

‘Three years.’

‘But don’t you find it very lonely?’

‘I came here to be lonely. Now enter. Please.’

With an extended hand he ushered me over the doorstep. ‘Straight on,’ he said, for we were now in the kitchen; and he pointed to a door in the side wall.

Mr. and Mrs. Deakin had risen politely from their chairs on either side of the kitchen range, where a fire glowed red, even on this warm, sunny noonday.

This hot kitchen was obviously their living room. It had a bright red, over-patterned linoleum and was crowded with furniture and pictures and ornaments. The ceiling and the oak-beam across it were as clean and glistening as if the one had been whitewashed and the other blackened only yesterday. All the brass and copper ornaments glistened too. Evidently Mrs. Deakin, that round and comfortable little body, was as house-proud as all the others in these valleys.

I smiled at her as we crossed her room, and at the same time glanced round for the child. She was not here. Nor could I hear her voice or footsteps in the rooms above.

Mr. Herriot opened that further door for me, and we passed into a very different sitting room. It would be difficult to conceive of a sharper contrast. We seemed to have passed from one epoch to another, from the mid-nineteenth century to the mid-twentieth. Twice the size of the kitchen, this room was as bare of ornaments, knick-knacks and souvenirs as the other was bespattered with them. There was only one picture, hung over the fireplace, a fine Chardin; and only two ornaments, a bronze statuette by Rodin, and a marble bust that I was later to learn was Verrochio's work. For the rest, the room, with its pink-washed walls, held only a magnificent example of a Bolognese refectory table, an eighteenth century French sideboard, long as an altar, and three or four easy chairs disposed about the fireplace.

Nowhere was there a portrait of a friend.

'Whisky or gin?' he enquired. 'I should tell you my name is Martin Herriot.'

'Whisky,' I said, 'but a small one, please.'

From that altar-long commode he drew a decanter and siphon. He mixed me a drink; then put the decanter back again.

'Are you not having anything yourself?' I asked.

'No, I seldom take anything. No credit to me at all, for I've never felt any strong desire for alcohol. I content myself, as a rule, with a glass of dandelion and burdock. A child's drink, but I like it.'

He gave himself a tumbler of this beverage, and together we sat by the empty hearth, with our glasses in our hands.

We talked of the mountains, and of new walks which I had yet to discover and enjoy. Till this talk I had imagined I knew my way about the mountains well enough, but my knowledge could not compare with his. Only in my enthusiasm for solitary walks along the ridges and over the tops was I his peer.

My fervour kindled his, and soon the lover's fire within him burnt away all that unease, all that conflict between his desire to talk happily with a friend and his desire to detach himself from such an entanglement and be alone.

'Yes, people talk about the timber line,' he said, 'above which no trees grow and there's only alpine vegetation, but I have another line which I like to get above.'

'And what's that? The snow line?' I asked, trying to 'show off' by using another mountaineer's term.

'No, we can't be said to have a snow line here, though I've seen pockets of snow on Scafell as late as August. I mean the human line. The line above which there are no intakes and no dry-walls, and you can go for miles with no trace of men's footsteps and no reminder of their existence, except perhaps an old sheep nibbling the scanty herbage. I put our timber line at about two thousand feet, and the human line some five hundred feet higher.'

'But that won't do,' I objected. 'You can never escape the footsteps of men. However high you go you see the scratches of their boots on the rocks.'

'Yes, they are there of course, but I can tell you of places where you'll not notice them. Climb the North Face of Scafell by Lord's Rake and Deep Ghyll, and it's a thousand to one you'll walk alone.'

'Oh, I've done that. Often,' I told him, quickly and proudly.

'It's a favourite scramble of mine because when you emerge out of Deep Ghyll, like Pluto out of the mouth of Hell, you'll nearly always find the top of Scafell empty, while there's a vast population moving about on Scafell Pike. It's a grand thing to be alone on Scafell and have all the Mickledore ridge between you and your brothers on the Pike.'

I assented enthusiastically. 'I know exactly what you mean. In theory I have a brotherly love for all men everywhere, but I must say I'm never quite so at peace as when I'm a few thousand feet above them.'

'We are clearly a pair,' he said.

If I were anything of a mystic, I should say that one can

feel the eternity within one, when one's quite alone on a mountain top. If only I were the least like St. Simeon Stylites I'd sit alone on the Pillar and lose myself probing the eternity, the great cosmic power, around and within the individual.'

'Eternity? H'm. . . .' He said it as if not sure whether Eternity was an acquaintance he desired or feared. 'Well, we must do some of these walks together. When shall it be? To-morrow? The day after?'

'Any time you like. I am making a long stay here, so there's no hurry if you have guests.'

'Guests?' he echoed as if astonished by the word. 'I have guests? Why should you suppose I have guests?'

I spoke of the beautiful young woman I'd seen on his path. 'And I was under the impression that she walked into your house as if she were a guest.'

'When . . . when was this?' He stared at me, bewildered.

'Two days ago.' And here I verged on a mild lie. 'I was prospecting your route on to Great Barrock.'

'Two days ago. At what time?'

'About four o'clock in the afternoon.'

'No one entered this house at four in the afternoon. Of that I am sure. It had been raining, and I was at home all day.'

'Oh, but I think she did enter it. Where else could she have gone?'

His thick eyebrows came close together and sank lower as he stared at me and at the problem. Then he shook his head, beaten by it. 'Daniel,' he called through the door. 'Daniel, old man, can you come here a minute?'

'Aye, aye, Martin,' answered the old man's voice. 'Coomin' like a bird.'

And he came in, his lips chewing the last of some morsel he'd culled from his kitchen. 'Eh, what is it nah, Martin?'

I had little doubt that he liked to use Herriot's Christian name in my presence because it showed me on what terms they were.

'Daniel, did any young woman come into this house the day before yesterday at four in the afternoon?'

He grinned. 'Young woman? Fower in t'afternoon? Nay, lad, no sich luk.'

'Quite sure?'

'O'course Ah am!' And he continued placidly chewing. 'Aye, no one coom near us all day. It wur rainin' all mornin', and we none o' us left t'hahse, not even after it wur fine again.'

'I told you so,' said Herriot to me. 'You must have been dreaming.'

'I was very tired, I admit, and yawning for want of sleep, but I wasn't dreaming.'

'Why, did t'owd gentleman reckon he'd seed some'un?'

Owd! Even if one's over sixty-five one doesn't like that word. They are very trying, these old Yorkshiremen who pride themselves on their bluntness, and think all soft courtesies a weakness. The miserable, self-satisfied man just went on chewing.

'Yes. He saw a young woman and believed she walked into the house.'

'Happen it wur t'missus. Happen she'd bin aht on t'road fr'a minute.'

'No,' I said. And forgetting all tact and gallantry in my amazement—and perhaps still a little fretted by that word 'owd'—I explained, 'This was a very beautiful young woman.'

Daniel saw his opening and stopped chewing to laugh. 'Ah, well then, that wurn't ma lass. Young and beautiful, and she walked reet through t'open door into ma kitchen! Nay, sir, no sich luk. Maisie—hi, lass, coom in here. There's bin nobody coom through yon door in t'last week, sir, but me and t'missus and Martin. That's so, isn't it, Maisie?' Mrs. Deakin, plump, comfortable and fair, was now in the doorway. 'Nobbut us, eh? He says there was some'un at door.'

'Someone at the door?' Mrs. Deakin showed surprise.
'When?'

'When he went by two days ago. There wur no young woman theer then, wur there?'

'No,' Mrs. Deakin agreed. 'No one's come to this house for days, only Jim Vigod, and he's not a woman.'

'Aye, there y're, sir. Ye can tak our word for it. Sartin sure. No one bin here but Jim Vigod, and he's no beauty.'

'What!' I exclaimed. 'Not the little girl? Isn't she in the house at the present moment?'

'Little girl?' repeated Mrs. Deakin.

'A little 'un?' echoed her husband. 'Nay, theer's no one in t'hahse at t'moment but me and Maisie and Martin. And nah yerseln.'

Silence followed this; and the silence confirmed his words. Save for us four in the room, the house stood empty.

'Well,' I said—and then didn't know what to say. 'I hope

you won't think me quite mad, but I saw her playing in front of your house, not half an hour ago.'

Daniel Deakin looked from me to Herriot, and from him again to me. I could see in his keen little eyes that, as a result of this scrutiny, he paid me the compliment of pronouncing me sane. So he just shook a helpless head and spread two helpless hands, lifting his round shoulders as he did so.

'All right, Daniel,' said Herriot, dismissing him. 'That'll do. There's some mistake somewhere.'

'Got me fair beat,' said Daniel. 'Rum. Verra rum. Unless t'owd gentleman's bin seein' things.' And he withdrew, shaking that puzzled head. And I thought I heard him add to Maisie in the kitchen, 'Or unless t'owd gowk's talkin' muk by t'yard. Mebbe he's daft.'

'A little girl, you said?' Herriot was still frowning at me. 'Playing at my doorstep?'

'Yes, a child of about thirteen who was exactly like the young woman, so much so that I could only suppose she was her daughter. The resemblance was almost praeternatural: she might have been the woman when she herself was a child.'

Herriot's eyes stayed tethered to mine. 'Describe them both. The woman and the child.'

I described them in ample detail, and as I did so I was astonished at the definition I was able to give my portraits. Surely this was proof that I had seen them with great distinctness—I who usually see the details of a landscape far clearer than the form and colour of a woman. I began by mentioning the woman's hair, brown with flashes of gold, and her shadowy blue eyes, wide apart, and her flowered cotton dress—but for a second I stopped. I have never known anything like Herriot's frowning stare—a stare of dumbfoundment and fear. Then I came to the child and gave her the same gold-flushed hair and wide-spaced eyes; I described her gym tunic with the monogram on its breast—but as I mentioned this, his fist flung up to his mouth as if he were controlling an agony. Rather than let him think I noticed this I pursued my picture, but he, to my alarm and discomfort, sprang to his feet and cried, 'Stop! Oh, stop!'

I stopped at once; and there he stood before me, fists clenched, arms trembling, jaw thrust forward. 'Oh, my God!' he said. 'My God, my God!' And then, remembering my presence: 'Forgive me.' And again: 'Forgive me.' He walked to the window and gazed out, but I suspect he saw nothing. He stood

there quivering, and in his agony he must have forgotten my nearness again for he murmured to the air before him, ‘Oh, Helga, Helga . . .’

And with his back to me he stood there, very still.

I rose to go.

But then he swung round and exclaimed, ‘No, no. For God’s sake don’t go . . .’ A strange, helpless plea in a man so proud. ‘Wait, wait.’

‘Oh, but you look pale,’ I said. ‘You look really ill. Can I—let me get you a drink?’

‘No. I want no drink. I need no drink. But don’t go. Not yet. I—’

Slowly and somewhat doubtfully I sat down again; and he said, ‘Forgive me, but I must know more of this. Man, do you know what happened? Do you realize it? You saw someone I once loved very dearly and who has long since died. I am sure of it. You saw her as a woman and as a child.’

Was he mad? I had never seen anyone mad. Could a man deranged look as normal, as hale, and as powerful as he? For his comfort I said, ‘That woman and that child were real. They were no spirits.’

‘How do you know?’ he cried, almost angrily.

I could not answer and began to doubt, my heart throbbing, lest I had really been in the presence of something supernatural.

‘How can anyone know?’ he insisted. ‘Why, man, no one has been near the house, and you described her exactly as I saw her when she was yet at school. Exactly. Exactly. You saw her as I sat in this room thinking of her—a child still at school. I believe in nothing in Heaven or Earth, but often I pray to her, as Catholics pray to their saints, that she’d come to me in some form. I do, like a fool. . . .’ It was plain that the reserve of a normally reticent man was completely smashed. Speech was running away with him: he could not rein it in. ‘I sit in that chair and say to myself over and over and over again, “Come to me, Helga. Come. Come.” And I picture her coming towards the house. That was her as a child at school.’

As he said the words ‘a child at school’ his agony seemed to return upon him, and he walked away from me again to hide his pain. As for me, his words had lit strange lights in my brain, half amazement, half dismay, and I could not easily adjust myself to the normality around me.

He turned back again, put shaking hands on his hips, and

said, 'Forgive me for this outburst, and talk to me a little more. Have you some power of vision that the mediums claim they have, some power to see things not present to other people's senses?'

'I have gone sixty years and more without having any reason to suppose so.'

'But . . . but sometimes they say it's by no means a gift peculiar to themselves. They say that we all have it in some undeveloped form. Perhaps it can leap into life quite suddenly in one's later years, or in some time of great mental weariness or at the point of death. Look: you cannot escape this: you saw as if they were flesh and blood a woman who died many years ago and the same woman as she was as a child. Oh God, if you could make me see her! Not as a child, though; not as a child. That I could not bear. I must know more about this. Were they ghosts? Do you believe in ghosts?'

'No. But neither do I say I disbelieve in them. To deny them is still as unscientific as to affirm them. Surely. But those were no ghosts. It was bright sunlight at the time. The sunlight was glinting on the water. Ghosts are not seen in sunlight.'

'What were they then?'

'I can only imagine that by some sort of clairvoyance I saw your thoughts for a moment or two in material form before me.'

'But is that possible?'

'It must be, I suppose—if it happened.'

'And that's what you really think?'

'I can only suppose so, though I still find it hard enough to believe. One has heard of such things happening to others sometimes, but one never believes they will happen to oneself.'

'And it's only that?' he said, very sadly, like a man in a deep disappointment. 'Only that?'

'What else could it be? She was no spirit from beyond—'

'Why? Why not?'

'Why? Because if she was someone long since dead she could not be both a child and a woman.'

'Could she not? How does one know? What do we know of a world where Time does not exist and where I suppose yesterday and tomorrow are the same as today? Perhaps the essential person is always the same and might appear in any form. Don't you think so?'

To me such ideas about Time are always sympathetic, and I sat wondering whether in that moment on the hedge-bordered

path the veil of custom had indeed been lifted for me from the world, so that I had seen something of the strange landscapes that lie behind. Here was a valley only a mile or so from the highroad with our modern materialism beating like a sea around it—motors coming as far as the church, aeroplanes flying overhead, wireless waves beating upon the aerials on cottage or farmhouse roofs—and yet! What had I met there?

‘Please, I must know more about this,’ he was saying. ‘Could we walk together and talk about it together?’

‘Why, of course!’ I said. But how subtly changed the world would seem when we walked out into the sunlight. ‘Whenever you wish. Let us go out now, if you like.’

§

So it came about that, in the end, he told me the whole story. That very morning we walked together side by side along High Scoat Bank and up on to Great Barrock. And all the way he told me much, but not all. When we returned homeward he came with me as far as the pony track over Slape. This meant that we went together down the farm-road between the flower-sprayed hedges, but of these I was little aware, because I was wondering all the time, with a heart uneasily throbbing, Should we see her before us? Round the next bend? I could feel that he was thinking the same. But no; nothing; and when at the foot of the pony track we said our good-byes, he gave me the small secret smile of one who knew what we’d both been thinking.

Sharing his deep interest in a mystery, I went many times to his house and walked the mountains with him. And once, only once, and then for less than a moment, I saw the woman on the path. It was at a moment, of course, when all my thoughts were centred on her; and I saw her just as I had seen her before, walking quite naturally towards his home. No one could seem more real, more a creature of this earth. Indeed the clarity with which I saw her was astonishing: about my sight of her there was no indefiniteness or ambiguity. But—and perhaps this was because of what he had said about timelessness—it did seem to me as if, at the moment of sight, Time had stopped, and there was nothing but stillness in the valley. Or how shall I put it? That the normal sounds of the valley were all there, but, *behind* them, a sudden, visiting stillness, as if,

for a breath, I discerned the silence behind the boundaries of Time.

Or is that only how I think of it now? Perhaps.

That she was *not* real—real in our normal uses of the word—but something subjective or some fugitive phenomenon from Heaven knows where—was made finally plain to me by the fact that suddenly she was no longer there. There was nothing on the road before me but the sunlight. It was as if the whole valley, from mountain wall to mountain wall, had suddenly re-settled into its daily terrestrial reality. All its diurnal noises were clear once more: the bleating of the lambs, the ruffled prattling of the beck far below, and the rapid, saucy chatter of a chaffinch.

Nothing more after that. From that moment whatever abnormal capacity had temporarily been granted to me was withdrawn; my eyes were blind again; a close season for all such incomprehensible sights set in, and a close season, dear ladies, that has lasted until today.

I did not tell him of this second appearance, because I remembered the transport of anguish into which my previous statement had thrown him. We continued our friendly walks together. We were very good friends now; and there was every reason why we should be. That clairvoyant moment had linked us together in a few seconds of time, and, over and beyond this, there was our common love of the empty places high above the habitations of men. You will agree, I know, that friendships made among mountain-lovers are some of the sincerest and deepest of all. I liked his quiet courtesy and charm and could forgive him when at times he seemed to have retired into himself and forgotten me—I am all too capable of the same incivility. He liked the scientific cast of my mind because he could question me alike about the geological structure of the mountains and about the structures of an Invisible World. Sometimes I thought that he was trying to plumb my powers of forgiveness.

More and more of his confidence Martin Herriot gave me; more and more he sought my answers to his problems; and the day came when he told me at last the secret and terrible truth.

And where do you suppose he told me? Aptly enough, on a remote and empty mountain, for it was no story for the streets. On the top of Scafell, the highest mountain in England, save for its sister, Scafell Pike; just as far as possible, you see, from the hurry and sweat of humanity below.

We had climbed there by his favoured route: Lord's Rake,

the West Wall Traverse, and Deep Ghyll; and that, sure enough, is almost as unvisited a district as his Inlands valley. You know well enough that North Face of Scafell; certainly the noblest face of them all, but one of the most unfriendly, with those savage cliffs and buttresses of black rock that seem to stand forth and lean over you, sombre and hostile and menacing. And the water dripping, dripping, from the moist rocks, a most melancholy sound; and the stream of scree stones slipping under your feet on the steep Rake, as if the mountain were angry at the insolence of your assault! And the rocks sweating with moisture under your finger-holds, and portions of them even coming away in your hands, as if they would do nothing to help you!

Herriot led; led all the way: up the Rake and along the Traverse and up the dark chimney of Deep Ghyll. When we emerged out of that chimney—just as he had said, ‘like Pluto out of the mouth of hell’—we walked over the empty cap of moth-grey stones and rocks to the summit cairn. There we sat with our backs to the cairn, looking down at the rolling foot-hills and the silver sheet of Wastwater and, beyond it, all the green champaign country stretching for a dozen level miles to the lost harbour of Ravenglass and the Irish Sea.

Olympian the stillness up here, and over yonder on Gable top, reputed home of the old Norse gods! Here Herriot lit his pipe and clasped its bowl and after a very long silence, such as did not much surprise me because I was now used to his silences, he said, ‘I want to tell you something, if I may. I want to tell you the real truth about Helga. I have never told the whole story to anyone else before, but of late I have longed to tell it to one person. I have longed, longed, for the relief of speech. It was I who caused her death. No, I will not soften it; it was I who deliberately, carefully, and most cruelly murdered her.’

§

At first I tried to believe that he was exaggerating for effect, though this didn’t seem true to a character so reserved, quiet, and withdrawn; but on this and other days he told me, frankly and quietly, the whole story, right from the beginning. In later years a few other details were given to me by Daniel Deakin who knew nothing of the inner truth of it, and far more by Berl Mickiewicz, who knew all, and of whom you shall shortly hear.

The beginning lies in the Stepney squalors of fifty years ago. You know the Commercial Road East, running from Whitechapel to London Docks and Limehouse—that streaming, pounding, dinning artery which runs through London's ghetto, where the Jews are many and the Goys are few. On the south side, about a mile from Limehouse Cut, and in a predominately Gentile quarter, there is a little square with a railed garden in its midst. The little houses round the garden are fully two hundred years old, neat, flat-breasted Georgian residences, once no doubt the decent homes of shipmasters, chandlers, and small importers, in the days when Stepney and Ratcliff were pleasant brick villages in a green countryside. At the time of which I am speaking these masters were long since gone to their tombs in Stepney churchyard, and the little houses were overrun by some of the poorest in this teeming district—by street hawkers, dock labourers, lightermen and other workers of the waterside. Its pavements were no longer a quiet footway for orderly families; rather did they resound all day with the shouts of playing children, the vociferations of angry mothers from doorstep or window, and perhaps the shrill laughter of rowdy young girls as they passed a cluster of whistling hooligans at a corner.

The name of this once attractive but now decayed and decrepit little precinct is Omar Square.

On an evening, then, nearly fifty years ago, the pavements and roadway were as loud with children's voices as a Board School playground in the mid-morning Break. Here were little girls playing hop-scotch over lines they'd chalked on the crown of the road; there four little boys rolled their marbles along the pavement; two girls were bowling their iron hoops round the garden and wasting their breath by screaming as they ran; and at the south-east corner an assembly of youths in chokers, with their caps set cockily on one side, were playing pitch-and-toss. Their coins rang upon the ground.

In the other corner, the south-west corner, there was a gap between the houses where two or more had been pulled down, possibly after condemnation by the Council, and thus a piece of rough wasteground stretched between the side walls of the remaining houses, which were held up from collapsing on to the waste (and so joining their late neighbours) by stout raking shores. This hillocky wasteground, littered with old tins, rotting clothes, and rusting bed-ends, but all yellow, white and green with charlock, chickweed, sow-thistle and gipsy wort, was out

of sight of parents' eyes, and a covey of giggling little girls stood watching three boys practising an art which was impossible to girls: that is to say—if the ladies will forgive me, as I think they should, because there was little but innocence on the wasteground that day—the boys were using the jets from their bodies to trace on a side wall a few pleasing arabesques in undulant and intertwining lines.

Now, if you walked farther over that wasteground, you came to a narrow alley between backyard walls, and this path led to Dyers Street. Our business this evening is with some six or seven boys, of ages from nine to thirteen, who were stooping and slinking along between the walls, obviously playing at hunters or sleuths, and especially with the smallest and youngest of them, a short but well-built little fellow of nine, with regular but rather babyish features, thick overhanging dark hair, and sad, dark, beautiful eyes. He was following behind the rest because he was younger than any of them and in some doubt about his welcome.

This string of stooping eavesdroppers turned into Dyers Street and immediately came erect so as to walk its pavements with a show of innocence. But like the girls on the wasteground they giggled sometimes because they were in search of something 'wrong' and therefore fascinating. They knew that their parents spoke of Dyers Street, often in dropped voices, as 'the worst street in Stepney'—which was saying much, because it ran parallel with Cable Street, where the brothels were many, and with St. George's Street, which was once the notorious Ratcliff Highway, and where, even now, knifings were not uncommon.

The older boys understood what was implied by 'worst street'; they knew that much as Hatton Garden was a street of diamond dealers, and Harley Street a bazaar of doctors' booths, so Dyers Street was mainly occupied by merchants in prostitution. The younger boys only half understood what was the merchandise of Dyers Street, but they hid their ignorance or confusion, so as not to be despised. Of such was the youngest, lagging in some diffidence behind.

There was always an odd quietness in Dyers Street, as if it knew that its deeds were evil. The quiet little houses were but two stories high, with windows and doors that opened on to the pavement; and the boys walked very slowly past these windows and doors, in the hope of seeing, or hearing, something

'wrong': perhaps a customer slouching up to a door with a show of nonchalance like their own, or one coming away from a house—and him they would watch with interest and wonder. Once they stood and listened to sounds behind the curtains of a ground-floor room—low voices, slight laughs, small gasps. Farther on they heard sounds of a vehement quarrel coming from a first-floor window: the shouting of two women, the lower grunting of a man, and now and then a blow and a thud. Exciting these! Jamie Grant, the leader of the gang and a would-be know-all, suggested that it was probably one woman taking the skin off another because she'd stolen her best customer, or being beaten up by her pimp, after she'd sloshed him for trading another woman instead of her. The smaller boys nodded wisely, as if to say, 'Yes, it could well be that;' and did not understand.

Next their interest was drawn by a woman leaving one of the houses in her best array for the street. With a large feathered hat, and a feather boa tossed over one shoulder and pearls in her ears and her bosom thrust forward, she tapped away on high heels towards the regions round the docks. For a little way the boys followed her, but they stopped when they saw a little woman coming into the street on the arm of a gigantic grinning negro. By his side she looked no bigger than a child, but her face was not that of a child; it looked as old as the oldest of their mothers'.

'Caw-lummy!' exclaimed Jamie, in a pretence of proper disgust, and 'Caw!' said the others, agreeing with him like good little toadies.

When the couple had gone into a house and shut the door, the boys came softly along the pavement to loiter before the house and hear what they could hear.

But just then a runner from their square, a girl of fourteen, came from the walled alley and stood at its corner shouting a name. 'Marten 'Erriot! Martenerriot! Yer auntie wants you at once. Martenerriot, d'you 'ear?'

The youngest boy turned at the sound of his name, and the girl messenger, descrying his face, shouted 'Come along! She's 'ollerin' her 'ead off for you. She knows where you are. She knows where you bin. Sid Viney ran in and told her, and she ain't half mad with you. Gaw, you won't half cop it.'

The little boy's face blanched; he stood staring at her, his limbs transfixated, and only his heart racing.

'Wossat?' demanded Jamie, approaching the girl, with all his disciples following him. As spokesman of the gang, he had a right to know everything and he was confident that he alone could meet an emergency with wisdom. 'Wossat? What-say?'

'Martenerriot's auntie knows he's with you and what you're all up to, and she's fair mad about it. You know what Mrs. Langley is, when she's mad. She's going to take a stick to him, she is. She says you're a lot of filthy little beasts, but it's your mums and dads that—'

'What is it? What is it?' inquired two boys in the rear who had not heard her.

'Oh, shut up!' commanded Jamie. 'It's that cow, Flora Bell. Go on, Flora. What's that about my mum and dad? If anybody says anything against my mum and dad—'

'She says it's your mums and dads that's got to look ah'ter you, but it's her that's got to learn young Martin how to behave. She says some of you may be too big for a good hiding, but *he* ain't.'

'How'd she know we was here?'

'Sid Viney see her coming from the boozer and he run ah'ter her and told her.'

'Tole'er what?'

'That you was all in Dyers Street looking for tarts.'

'The rotten little sneak!'

'Christ, he's in for a lambing,' said one of the disciples, to please his leader. 'If he tells my dad, I'll knife him, I will.'

'He knows that. That's why he'll never nark on you,' said Jamie. 'Or on me. I'd like to see him nark on *me*! But he ain't afraid of young Martin.'

'Well, I vote we lamb him. Reckon he deserves a good bashing.'

'Yah!' agreed others. 'We'll fair mob him.'

'Come on, Martin,' commanded the girl, indifferent to what awaited Sid Viney. 'She sent me to fetch you.'

The little boy moved with slow unwilling steps towards her.

'Poor Kid Martin: he's for it,' said Jamie to his following, but his pity was submerged in his interest. 'Old Mother Langley'll tickle his arse for him so that he won't be able to sit down for a week.'

This prospect of witnessing, or at least listening to, an execution proved even more stimulating to their adolescent blood than anything they could hope to see or hear in Dyers Street,

and they shouted cheerfully, 'Come on! Kiddy Martin's in for a leathering. Come and let's see. Go on, Martin; there's no gettin' out of it. Go and get it over. There's no sense in blubbin'. It'll all be over in a few minutes, and then we'll take it out of Sid for you. Not half we won't.'

The little boy's eyes were drowned, and his mouth trembled as he moved forward to accompany the messenger. He followed her, a step or two behind all the way, as she threaded the walled alley and crossed the wasteground. The rest of the boys accompanied these two in a kind of triumph, some behind and some in front. Those in front were especially impatient for the entertainment; but one and all were excited, and therefore happy.

Jamie walked in dignity among those behind, and little Martin, as he walked to judgment, could hear him explaining in his know-all fashion all about his, Martin's, auntie.

'She's a fair terror, is Mrs. Langley, when she's got some booze in her. My mum says she don't half lead young Martin a life. She ain't half a cow. Her old man walked out on her long ago, and my dad says he don't blame him. He says he wouldn't 'a stopped an 'ahr with her. Gaw, I'm glad she ain't my mum, though I'd sock her if she tried any of her games on me.'

'Where's his ma?'

'Dead. My mum says she died o' flu the year before last. Mum says she went on workin' long ah'ter she ought to 'a stopped, and *whoosh!* she was alive on Monday and dead on Wednesday.'

'Lummy!'

'Yes, and Mrs. Langley, who's his dad's sister, went to look ah'ter them all, but soon his dad decided to go off and live with his eldest daughter, that there Mrs. Pace, in Tribe Street. My dad says that, like her old man, he decided to put all the daylight he could between him and Mrs. Langley; and I should say Dad's about right.'

'Yes; reckon that's about it,' said the sycophants.

'But didn't Martin go with him?' asked one.

'Nah!' denied Jamie. It was a ridiculous question in his view. 'Nah, he said he was fair sick o' brats and he give Mrs. Langley ten bob a week for his keep. My mum says she reckons she's only too glad to get two ogg a week, because her old man never sends her nothing. No one knows where he is. He's *gawn!*'

The sycophants nodded wisely.

The procession, with the condemned in the middle, swelled as it marched over the wasteground because it was here joined by every one of the boys and girls who had been playing there. They abandoned all their games among the garbage and weeds for the more exciting business of marching a victim-in-disgrace to the door of his house. Martin, red-eyed and snivelling, walked into the Square with a sovereign's escort of happy, prancing, children, before and behind. The house was almost the middle one in the southern terrace of the Square, and on its step stood an obese woman whose dirty pink blouse hinted at the shape of enormous hanging dugs and whose faded black skirt seemed strained to bursting about the great globe of her thighs and buttocks. Lifting up in front, it disclosed naked red feet in ragged felt slippers. The sleeves of her blouse, rolled up above her elbows, showed big pink forearms which, swelling from wrist to elbow, had the shape of the legs of a grand piano. These sleeves were rolled up because she'd come from a wash-tub, but they looked now as if they had been bared to wreak the necessary punishment on her charge. As she awaited him on her doorstep, they rested akimbo on her hips.

'Come on!' she shouted directly she saw the approaching triumph with Martin as the centre of it. 'Come on, and I'll learn you to go pokin' yer nose into what you never ought to know nothing about. I never heard the like of it; all you boys, the whole lot of you, ought to have that sort of disgustingness thrashed out of you: I don't know what your pa's and ma's are about. I've heard before as you go ferreting for filth in that there Dyers Street. Shame on the lot of you!'

Heads came out of windows, faces looked round doors, some men and women stepped out on to the pavement to stare at the shouting woman. The square was well used to the shrill tirades of Mrs. Langley issuing from her threshold or from an upper window, but it never wearied of them as a diversion; always its people came forth to watch the performance, listen to its dialogue and learn its *raison d'être* before turning back into their homes with shoulder-shrugs or grins or shocked shakings of the head.

As the procession came abreast of her door she threw out a hand and seized Martin by the shoulder. 'Now just you come and take what you'll get.'

'No, auntie, no!' pleaded the little boy, dragging back.

'Come on, you little swab. You've earned what you're going

to get.' She tossed loose hairs off her forehead, because her grey hair, after being carelessly pinned up, was falling to pieces.
'Come and take it, and don't be such a little coward.'

'No . . . please . . . auntie. . . .'

'Go away, all you boys and girls! Get along with you. Go on!'

Not one obeyed. They stayed looking on, as she dragged the struggling and now yelling child into the house and slammed the door. They stood around to hear the stripes and the screams.

§

As Mrs. Langley and Martin passed from street to hallway they went straight into that stench of a London house which its occupants have long 'let go'. In this house, two hundred years old, the stench seemed to have impregnated the rotting floor-boards, the cracked ceiling, and the bug-ridden panelling whose age no one could tell. It was a stench compounded, it would seem, of every possible human secretion. Sometimes it suggested dead things in the skirting or under the floor. At this age Martin hardly noticed it because he'd lived with it so long—and, besides, this evening he had other matters to think of. He learned to notice it, and hate it, only after he'd been into the clean and scoured house of Berl Mickiewicz.

Mrs. Langley dragged the child into the kitchen at the back; and here the stench gathered into itself the hot smell of wet garments drying on lines festooned beneath the ceiling. In a corner of the kitchen was a small bath with a board on top of it to make an extra table-top or counter. She swept a bundle of unwashed clothes from here to the floor, spread the body of Martin on the wood, dragged excitedly his knickers from off his buttocks and beat them excitedly, happily, with the flat of her hand.

Outside, the children, hands at their mouths, listened to the slaps and the screams.

§

Often Jamie Grant's know-all expositions were only in remote touch with the truth, because, rather than appear not to possess the truth about everything, he would guess at large parts of it and assert them as facts. The less sure he was of their accuracy, the more impatient he was of contradiction. If contradicted, he

asserted them louder, as if this made them more true. Nevertheless his brief peripatetic account of Martin's position in Mrs. Langley's house was in substance accurate.

Arthur Herriot, the child's father, had been for thirty years cellarman at Trapnell's Brewery in the Mile End Road. There he was held in high esteem, and indeed he was a good, reliable, punctual workman, fond of his labour among the casks, proud of his long service to the Brewery, popular with his mates, and respectful and loyal to his masters. At home he was a vain, impatient, shouting, clouting man; not the only man in these streets, or in the wide world, who kept his public life and his private life in different and dissimilar compartments.

He had not married till he was twenty-seven, a most unusual delay in these streets, but it was due—and he frankly, even loudly and proudly, admitted this—to his determination to spend his earnings on himself rather than on a crowd of confounded brats. When he did marry, it was only because he had to; a most confounded brat was on the way. The woman he married was three years older than he; and this again was most unusual; but it came to pass because his brain was far more intelligent when it dealt with casks and beer than when it considered the facts of human fertility, and both before his marriage and at the confounded solemnisation of it, he encouraged a vague notion that a woman of thirty was less likely to produce brats than one of eighteen. To his surprise and vexation, however, the brats arrived in a regular rhythm, each one some eleven months behind the other—though there were two satisfactory breakdowns that interfered with the perfection of this pattern. As each child came knocking for admission into his paternal care Art Herriot muttered imprecations to himself and went out to console a heavy heart with beer. Beer was something with which you knew where you were. Martin Herriot was the youngest of nine, the seventh of the seven survivors, born when Art Herriot was forty three and Olive Herriot forty six. He was that child who seems so often to arrive in the last stage of his mother's child-bearing journey; and Art Herriot was not a little vexed by this curious fact (if fact it was) of human fertility. He went with it into a silence and pulled his chin, his lips, and his little grey moustache as he considered it with distaste. Surely his grey hairs had not merited this. When Martin was nine his elder brothers and sisters were all out at work, and some were even married. Thanks to the esteem which Art enjoyed at

Trapnell's, he had been able to find jobs for the boys there: one worked in the cellars with him; another was a horsekeeper in the stables; a third was a brewhouse hand.

As Jamie Grant had said, Olive Herriot had died very suddenly after continuing to 'oblige' in an eating-house kitchen though the influenza was hot within her, rather than lose the little money which this part-time labour brought into the house. Influenza changed to pneumonia as she took to her bed; and in forty-eight hours she was dead. This amazing death left Art with three of his brats still on his hands: a boy of fourteen, a girl of twelve, and Martin, then only seven. Everyone asked what on earth the poor man would do, and he not so young any more. But a few streets away lived his sister Vera whose husband, Peter Langley, had recently 'walked out on her with everything he could lay his hands on' and vanished for ever into the mists of the London valley. 'Our Vera,' fifty now and a year younger than Art, was scraping together none too bad a weekly income by laundering and charring for her neighbours and by living in two rooms of her Omar Square house (which at least Peter Langley hadn't been able to take with him into the mists) and letting the other rooms to lodgers. At first, after Olive's death she came daily to help her brother and look after his 'poor mites'—at a price, which was only fair since she was losing money by deserting her wash-tub and ceasing to char. But after a very few weeks this arrangement lost its first bloom, because both brother and sister were self-centred, hot-tempered, shouting people and, to the amusement of the neighbourhood, Art Herriot walked out on Vera very much more quickly than Pete Langley had done. He did not disappear—no need to do that, since he stood in no danger of a maintenance order—he just walked as far as his daughter Genevieve's home in Tribe Street where she lived in some comfort with her husband, Fred, a hospital porter. Genevieve was the brat who, arriving so unexpectedly and so confoundedly, had forced him to marry and beget nippers, so perhaps he felt she owed him some reparation for thus spoiling his life. He'd have been a very warm man if he hadn't had nippers. Genevieve, twenty three and too old now to be clouted, had grown quite fond of him in a laughing way and was ready to receive him and her pretty little sister Marigold into her house. Genevieve—Marigold—Martin—there was a kinship between the picturesque names he found for his children and the way he wore his cap on one side of his grey hair; they enabled him to feel

that he was a man of some culture; well read, intellectual, imaginative.

The boy of sixteen, Valentine, had gone to sea as a saloon boy, so there was only Martin to be provided for. Genevieve said that he would be more than she could manage and it wouldn't be fair to Fred to have a child about the place; and Art said that, for his part, he was sick of brats, anyhow. And Our Martin was a sulky little beast, he added; and he was fair sick of him. Then it was that Auntie Vera suggested to her brother that she would take the child and look after him, 'if ten shillings a week wouldn't hurt you.'

§

True enough that Martin could sometimes be 'a sulky little beast'; but he was not so always, any more than his father was always in a state of wrath and clouting, or that his Auntie Vera was always indulging herself in the strangely stimulating delight of beating his bare buttocks with her bare hand. In the latter days in his father's house he had resented it whenever he was shouted at or assaulted, and he could turn into himself and incubate this resentment behind a tight-lipped silence till it was a monstrous growth, not easily excised. But just as his father had long periods between clouts, when he was genial and generous and joking, so Martin had far more periods when he was happy and engrossed in a game than when he was hating everybody and ready to kick and pummel the Universe.

These periods of high resentment were undoubtedly more frequent, now that he was given into the hands of his Auntie Vera. He had been fond of his mother who had sometimes made much of him, calling him 'her baby', and when she died he had given himself to thoughts of suicide. He had devoted long minutes, when apparently at play in the street, or walking home from school, to considering the least painful method of self-destruction. And when he learned that his father and Marigold were going to live with Genevieve while he was to be 'kicked out' and made to live with Auntie Vera, his dignity was wounded, and he considered the possibility of 'learning them all' by jumping to his death in the waters of Limehouse Cut. He did not bring himself to this pitch, but the soreness remained a secret resentment within him. He was rather pleased with this resentment, and self-pity. It meant that he could tell himself

in secret that he hated Auntie Vera, though here again there were long periods when he forgot to hate her or anyone else and was quite happy in the Omar Square house.

§

Bitterly he hated her that evening after she'd beaten him on the bath-board. As soon as, frightened by his screaming, she released him, he ran from that kitchen out into the backyard, while her self-justifying words followed him, ' You naughty, naughty little boy! You'll come to no good if you go on like this, mark my words. It's my duty to punish you and bring you up properly. It's my duty.' He slammed the door on those words. What he was going to do in the yard he did not know: he knew only that he was going to keep out of her sight so that she could feel his hate, and out of sight of all men everywhere, since he now hated them too.

And there in the yard he either stood quite still, picking at his finger nails, or he walked to and fro, drawing his finger along the mortar between the bricks of the old high lichenized wall. Sometimes he just stood and let his eyes follow the flies that buzzed about the dustbins or issued from above the door of the stinking privy. For one hour, two hours, he remained there, with some notion that *she* should be the first to speak. At one time he was playing with the rusty handle of a cast-out mangle and making its rollers creak and turn; at another he sat on the ragged cane seat of a cast-out chair and leaned his head against a drainpipe.

That head against the drainpipe housed two dreams, each the opposite of the other. The first and happier dream was that one day he would be a very great man indeed, and all of them, father, auntie, brothers and sisters, would have to come and bow down to him; the other was that one day, when his auntie was out, he would turn on the gas-cooker in the kitchen so that she would come home and find him dead. And his father would come and look upon him lying there.

No, he was resolved not to enter the house till she called him in, and he was not too unhappy in this resolve. He heard her moving about the kitchen and singing and humming to herself, but never a word said she to him. The daylight greyed into dusk, and still she did not call. Dark gathered around him, and the cold too, so that he shivered. The stars now hung in their

places above his narrow brick-walled yard, and he stood looking up at them and wondering about them as he shivered. He shivered from the regions round his heart to the extremities of his limbs, but he did not surrender and go in.

§

Within doors Auntie Vera continued to hum and to sing. No doubt she was a little ashamed of what she had done and was trying not to feel remorse, because this was a feeling she disliked. And even if she did feel a little ashamed that she should have beaten him so savagely for her own momentary pleasure, she was never going to let him suspect this. And therefore she went on humming and singing loud enough for him to hear, so that he might suppose her quite unimpressed by, and unobservant of, his dignified demonstration in the yard. *She* would not go to the door; *he* should be the first to make a move.

In fact there were two demonstrations in being, with only an old house-wall between them: one by a woman of fifty in her kitchen, and one by a child of nine in a backyard.

But sometimes, as she cast a sidelong glance through the window and saw him there either standing quite still or fiddling with the mangle, did she not feel a small uncomfortable pity for him and bring her eyes quickly away? At such times did she for a moment look at the strange, rather shameful, truth that she enjoyed beating him because his face was beautiful, that she was pleasurable excited when she was given, or could invent, an excuse for administering this castigation? Let him disobey her, or be rude, or have stolen something from the larder, or be telling a lie (as he so often did) and she could go to this pleasure with her blood alight, like a lover in whom the tide of desire is high.

She did not yield in this tussle of wills. The darkness might be down, but she did not call him in. At nine o'clock she left the house to go to the Watermen's Arms, with no word addressed to the backyard. Let him do what he liked out there. But she did make up his bed on the bathboard and leave the gas-jet alight, and put on the table a loaf of bread and a jar of jam. Then went.

Out in the yard Martin suddenly stopped in his paces and stood listening. Silence in the kitchen. He slipped close to the window, but not so as to be seen through it. Not a sound within;

no voice; no footsteps. She had gone. Gone to her pub. As quietly as a burglar he turned the handle of the door. Yes—silence and emptiness. He crept in.

For a time he wandered about the kitchen, not at all sure, in his hate, that he would eat what she had laid out for him. He wandered about, looking at things, fiddling with things. Not yet did he feel a distaste for what he saw, but it dropped into the good tilth of a child's memory to bring forth abundant fruit later. Under the dresser was a chamber pot, full almost to the rim; it was often there, and full, because the w.c. was outside and Auntie Vera swore she wouldn't go out in the wind or the rain. The coal scuttle by the fireplace she had used as a refuse bin: on its knobs of coal lay breadcrusts green with mildew, a banana skin blackening, and a ball of newspaper bloody from the joint she had brought home on Saturday night. The dust on the dresser was not only deep but blackened by smuts from the fire. Among the cups on the dresser was an open jar of marmalade now furry with mould; an open sardine tin whose oily, uneaten residue was now bad and stank; and two dead bluebottles. These, because dead, fascinated him. Would it be good to be dead with one's troubles at an end?

From the kitchen he went into the front room, her bedroom, that he might peep round the window curtains and see if she was in the street. Here the bed was just as she had left it in the morning, its bedclothes tossed aside and half on the floor. The basin on the wash-stand was half-full with stagnant, soap-filmed water. A dirty cup and plate was on the dressing-table with her hair-filled brushes and broken, hair-filled comb.

For a while he leaned on the window-sill and looked out into the street. Then a little hungry, he returned to the kitchen table and prepared for himself a slice of bread and jam, which he ate, sitting on a chair with his feet on the rung so that his knees were as high as his chest. Then he undressed, put out the gas, and, quite naked, climbed up among the bed-clothes on the bath-board. There, all passion spent, his body as warm as it was weary, he forgave Life with a child's forgiveness, and was soon asleep.

§

Conditions need not have been so straitened and dirty in that house, nor need that faecal stench have occupied it from threshold

to attic as Martin lay sleeping. By her charring, laundering, and letting, and by collecting her ten shillings a week for Martin's board, enough money came in through its door to keep decency within the walls and poverty without. The charring in the main was a matter of cleaning doorsteps, passages and pavements for her neighbours; the laundering was done either in these neighbours' kitchens or washhouses or brought home in a footbath, basket or bundle. Her payment for these services was not high, but there were perquisites: she frequently came away from a kitchen where she'd 'obliged', bringing something whose absence would not be noticed—an ounce or so of tea in an old envelope, several lumps of sugar in her skirt pocket, a potato or two hidden among the washing, and perhaps a knife and fork if the supply in the neighbour's house was plentiful and that in her own getting scarce. The lodgers paid five shillings or seven-and-six for their rooms, but that was not the whole of the help they brought to Mrs. Langley. They were working girls or unmarried working men, out all day; and as each had a gas trivet in his room on a shilling-in-the-slot meter, she could nip upstairs and boil or fry at this lodger's charges today and at another's tomorrow. Generally she visited only one gas-ring at a time, but sometimes she had a kettle in one room and a frying pan in another, and Martin, down below, would hear her slippers feet flapping happily across the landing from one lodger's gas to the other's.

So there should have been money and perquisites enough in that house to provide a tolerable living for one woman and a child; but half of that money, and more, went over the bar-counters of the Watermen's Arms in Cable Street and the Castle Oak in the Commercial Road. This again was a phenomenon that the child accepted without criticism. But not without fear. If Auntie Vera came home from the pub with a jug of stout in her hand, that was all right, but if the hours passed over him as he lay on his bedboard and she did not return, he began to be afraid, because now he knew that she might come lurching home by wall and railing, halting here and there to talk to herself or to address a stranger passing by. He would slip into the front room to see if she was coming. Perhaps he saw her in the Square, holding on to a railing, and raced back to his bed. She would stumble into the house and into the kitchen where he lay, and there, blundering into chair or scuttle or clothes basket, might fall forwards to the floor and

remain there for a while on her hands and knees. Or, staggering into the room, she might retch and retch, voiding the contents of her stomach into the chamber-pot, and then to the thick close air of the house was added the smell of her vomit. He did not know what to do. With a child's tact he lay on the bed pretending to be asleep, but peeping between the lids of his eyes.

The day after that violent beating of him, her excitement and lust having passed but her remorse remaining, and with it a desire to be remembered with liking rather than loathing, she began to offer explanations of what she had done. Not apologies—she would never utter them—but justifications.

' You see, Martin,' she said, as she stood at the table peeling potatoes, ' it's my duty to bring you up properly. You haven't no mother any more to do it for you. You must always remember that I took you in when your poor mother died and your dad didn't want any more to do with you. Yes, and when I wasn't as young as I used to be, neither. Remember that. I should be failing in my duty if I didn't bring you up with a round turn when I see you going wrong. Where would you'a bin if I hadn't step in and undertaken the bringing up of you? Of course I know people'd say I bin paid for it, but, lord, what's your dad's ten bob a week. It don't go nowhere. You cost me a sight more than that. It isn't only your food, you see, but it's rent, coal, gas, insurance and everything. I don't know how we manage to live. You see how I have to slave to keep our heads above water. I'm sure I don't want to punish you—I don't enjoy it—you don't think I get any pleasure out of it, do you? I just regard it as my duty. An unpleasant duty, but one that's got to be done. You do see that, don't you? '

' Yes, Auntie.'

' Yes, and you'll be grateful one day to your poor auntie that she brought you up properly and learned you pretty sharply not to do things that are wicked and wrong.' She carried the saucepan of potatoes from table to stove. ' Yes, it'd do that Jamie Grant a power o' good if his dad gave him a taste of what I give you last night. But not all parents do their duty like I do. You see that, don't you? '

Martin did not at once answer.

' Answer me! ' she commanded, raising her voice and halting with the saucepan in her hand. ' Answer me, will you! You know I done right, don't you? '

Her raised voice always frightened him; always it jumped

the tears into his eyes. ‘Yes, Auntie,’ he said quickly. So one replies to eyes that menace. With appeasement rather than truth.

The sight of his eyes suddenly wet always raised a small pity in her. ‘And you’re grateful to me for all I done for you?’

‘Yes, Auntie.’

‘That’s good. That’s right.’

But even if she’d succeeded in convincing him that she’d acted admirably last night, she hadn’t convinced herself, and she felt a longing to make some reparation for that performance on the bedboard. She was particularly nice to him all day and in the evening after his tea she said, ‘You bin a good boy all day, and I’ll give you a little treat. How would you like to come along to the Castle with me, and I’ll give you a nice ginger beer?’

‘Oh, thank you, Auntie. Oh, yes, please.’

‘Yes, you see I not only puni^{sh}h you when you’re naughty but I reward you when you’re good—though, as you know, I can’t afford much. Come along now.’

And so they went together out of that house into the Commercial Road and westward along that hammering thoroughfare to the Castle Oak.

The Castle Oak might have a mediæval-sounding name, but nothing could have been more modern than its garish and glaring street-front: all shining brown tiles and graven glass under big gas-lanterns dependent from ornamental iron brackets. It had wide swing-doors that led into Public Bar, Private Bar, Saloon Bar, and Jug and Bottle. At the side of the glittering Saloon Bar, a long narrow passage ran inwards between the blank party-wall and the opaque glass windows of the saloon. It ended in a narrow blind wall. It would have been a meaningless passage, open to the street and leading nowhere, if it hadn’t been furnished with a bench against the whole length of the party-wall. Here on this bench sat mothers with babies on one arm and glasses of gin or tumblers of stout in the opposite hand, or with their young children playing about their knees, as they sipped and gossiped. Now and then a man came from the noisy saloon bringing his woman another glass and taking away her empty one. This blind corridor, technically outside and not inside the pub, had been made for these mothers and children, since the Law had lately forbidden the presence of children in a public house.

Auntie Vera placed Martin on this bench among the mothers

and children and went into the bar. She brought him a ginger beer, and he sat sipping it. For half an hour he sat there, long after the glass was empty, but then, having remembered him, she came out with a second glass. But after that another half hour, another hour, passed, and he remained there, swinging his legs and wondering what to do with this second empty glass. He held it on his knee and just sat there watching the other children pull at their mothers' skirts and perhaps blub. He listened to the tinkling notes of a mechanical piano in the saloon and to the rowdy chorusing of men and women. Often he heard the shrill, screaming laughter of women and tried to distinguish his auntie's voice among the others. Whenever he heard the sighing and groaning of unseen swing-doors, as men and women came out to go home he leaned forward to see if it was his auntie; but no, it was not; it never was. And he could only sit there, fidgeting. Fortunately a man came out with a further treat for his wife and saw him and took pity on him, saying, 'Here, sonny, you done with that glass, ain't you? I'll take it in for you, see. Is your ma inside? Yer auntie? Well, she won't be all that longer, I expect. Cheerioh. Keep your pecker up.'

Free of his glass, he left his seat and dawdled on the pavement, watching the buses and lorries and vans go boring into the far darkness. He yawned and began to be very sleepy. At one point a man from Omar Square came out and, recognizing him, said, 'Hello, mate. Yer auntie's sozzled again. Best git home.' But he didn't dare to walk home without his auntie's permission, so he waited on the pavement, sometimes leaning against the tities of the pub wall.

A clock over the road said ten to ten, and ten o'clock, and ten fifteen; and still he seemed forgotten. Then suddenly the saloon doors groaned and sighed and protested, and a man emerged supporting a woman by her arm-pit. As she came into the light of the big suspended lamp, he saw that it was his auntie, and that another man was supporting her by her other armpit.

'Come on, mother,' the leading man was saying in kindly, encouraging tones. 'We'll soon have you home, and then you can get some kip and sleep it awf.'

'The boy,' she said. 'The boy.'

'Is this the nipper?' asked the second man. 'This here His Highness? This your mum, laddie?'

'She's me auntie.'

'Ah, your auntie? Yes, well, she's no light weight, your auntie. And you live with her, do you?'

'O'course he lives with me. What'you think? I took him in and cared for him when his poor mother—'

'Yes, well that was fine. And now we'll all go home shall we? Heave her up. Heigh-ho and up she rises. Come on, sonny lad. You can show us the way home.'

'His dad didn't want nothing to do with him, and I took him in. He's not as grateful as he ought to be. No, not when I done everything for him. I done everything.'

'Go on now! Well, have you really? That's fine. Lead on, sonny.'

They bore her home—that word alone describes the way they held her up as she sagged at the knees between one step and the next. All the way they were merry and kindly and encouraging, even when, recognizing the face of a neighbour, she insisted on halting and staring at his back and shouting after him, 'He's no good. Arst his wife. Arst Mrs. —— Whatever-her-name is. I forget. For' moment I forget. Yes, he should be locked up, he should.'

'Course he should,' agreed one of the men. 'Why not? Do him good. And do you good too, lady, to be in your bidies. Come: be a good girl and come along. Me arm's giving out. Come on.'

'No, no. Don't force me.' She seized upon a railing. 'I won't be forced. I'll never be forced. Not in all my life has anybody forced me yet.'

'We ain't forcing you, love. We're just gently helping you along. *Phew!* Ever so gently now.'

'Well, if it's only that, I'll come. If you don't force me, I'll come.'

'That's a good girl. Where's the kid?'

'Yes, where's Martin? I took him in when his poor mother—'

'He's coming along behind all right, mother. Come on, sonny-me-lad. You can't lead the troops from behind. Omar Square you said, didn't you? Well, only a few yards more, thank the Lord.'

They dragged her into Omar Square, and now Martin was far in front because he didn't want to be recognized from any window as a part of this unseemly group.

'Is this the house, son? Good. Come on, mother. Only

four steps up. Allay oop! Allay oop; and up she rises!' The good fellows got her through the front door which was on the latch, and directly they crossed the threshold they met the thick faecal smell of the house like the breath of a body diseased.

'Gaw-crikey!' exclaimed the one in front. 'Breathe on me, Breath of God.'

They got her into the kitchen, lighting the gas for her and letting her slump into the basket chair by the fender. And to Martin they said, 'You go to bed, sonny. She'll be all right in the morning. Time you was asleep. Good-bye. Thank you for the party. Good night.'

They went out quietly.

Martin undressed and got beneath his bed-clothes on the bath board. And he lay there watching her. She sat perfectly still on her chair, her hands folded in her lap and a fixed smile on her face. She might have been a monumental figure representing Smiling Content. She might have been one who had reversed the fable of Galatea and been changed from a woman of warm flesh into a statue. She had hardly moved at all when his tired eyes closed in sleep.

§

Martin's school was the St. Mary Lane School across the Commercial Road. Possibly because it was a Church school, it was a building in stucco Gothic with gables, pointed trifoliated windows and a high four-centred arch above its main doors. Every morning till he was a little over thirteen, Martin walked across that hammering highway towards its bell which was tolling slowly and drearily across a sea of roofs and chimneys. He passed under that arch and across a bare passage into its main hall. This was a long rectangular room with folding partitions of pitch-pine and glass that could be drawn across the floor to convert the hall into three large class-rooms. At nine o'clock all the boys stood assembled in the hall for a hymn and prayers. A favourite hymn of the Head Teacher was

Around the Throne of God a band
Of glorious Angels ever stand;
Bright things they see, sweet harps they hold,
And on their heads are crowns of gold.

Martin did not doubt this statement as he sang the words, but he wondered how that glorious assembly round the throne managed to stay where they were and not come tumbling through the sky on to the roofs of East London. He conceived of that angelic congregation as falling somewhere on to those roofs because, if ever you looked from a high window, you saw their slates and chimneys stretching to the rims of the sky.

Another recurring hymn was 'All things bright and beautiful'. The children enjoyed roaring its merry tune, but to most of them, and certainly to Martin, some of its verses were words and little more, because they had never visited any part of England where the houses, pavements and lamp-posts stopped.

The tall trees in the greenwood,
The meadows where we play,
The rushes by th' water
We gather every day.

Martin did not know what a meadow was, nor what rushes were. No rushes sprang from the swamps of mud between the dank green Ratcliff Stairs and the pewter-grey waters of the Thames. He sang the pretty words in his high treble, enjoying them, though they built no picture in his mind. But if they gave him no picture they raised dreams as he sang—coloured dreams that perhaps brought him at last to the Inlands valley where the meadows tilted down from the mountains, and the beck went sounding through the trees.

Every Wednesday all the children were taken to the parish church, except those whose parents lodged a 'conscientious objection', and these were few, most of the parents not caring twopence whether their children went to church or stayed away. The Vicar had long since delegated this weekly task, together with other humdrum parochial duties, to a young curate; and to him who, like his vicar, had lost his first enthusiasms it was as perfunctory a business as to most of the children. The final effect of these compulsory services, as of the daily Scripture Lessons designed also to fashion Martin into a devout Christian, was to school him into becoming an atheist. Not that at first he questioned the existence of God but that the presentation of this divinity as a Father who rewarded and punished likened Him only to his own father, the heavy-handed cellarman, of whose blows he was afraid and for whose person he felt little

but a resentful dislike. So, directly he was old enough to doubt he snatched at disbelief with comfort and joy.

Since he was always one of fifty or sixty in a class-room he sat for most of the time in a state of dreaming idleness. Usually he was not listening to the teacher at all but dreaming of his future greatness when he would have wealth and fame. Like most children on the easy slope to adolescence he found it much simpler to dream of this greatness than to do any work in preparation for it. He might be timid and shy, thanks to his father's fist and his auntie's palm, but the shyness veiled much of that father's vanity and cocksureness. He was confident, though with what justification not even he could say, that he would do bigger things in life than most of these other forty nine children sitting around him. Nothing in his schoolwork promised any distinction hereafter, but he believed in the distinction because he needed to believe in it. In actual fact his brain was a fine instrument, but at present it was an inert one, since he never used it seriously if he could avoid doing so. When he reached eleven he was still barely literate, and the teachers did not forbear to abuse him for his slowness and to mock at him as 'feeble-minded'. To which abuse and mockery he responded always with a sour silence and set lips, at which they mocked the more. And the more they ridiculed him, the darker the look on his round, rather babyish face. Then he was a furnace in which a flaming hate blent with a smouldering resolve to shatter them all with his greatness one day. They did not know that one day their sole claim to fame would be that they had taught among their pupils the great Martin Herriot. Nor did the boys know that one day they would brag to everybody of having sat in the same classroom as Martin Herriot.

Often when he was supposed to be doing a written task he was not doing it but drawing instead. He liked drawing houses, churches, ships, and policemen. Once a teacher surprised him at this illicit pastime and, picking up the sketches, nodded over them sententiously and said, 'Strange. Strange. Again and again in my experience, boys, I have found the same thing: the biggest fool in the class is the best drawer.' And Martin did not know whether he was furious with this comment or pleased with it; but he began to think big things of himself as an artist. Perhaps he would be the greatest artist England had ever seen. Actually the drawings were not good: they were careful and accurate and stiff and uninspired. There was no fire of originality

in any of them. But he did not know this and thought fine things of them and of Martin Herriot.

§

At half-past-four the wearisome immurement ended, and the children flooded out to play. Now, since the school stood at a point where the Gentile population met and mingled with the Jewish, and since the Gentile boys, copying their dads, had a contempt for the Yids, a popular game was to stroll off in gangs to the Jewish streets and there shout jeering remarks through the doors of the Jewish shops or up at the windows of the Jewish houses. It might be that, strolling along, they would espy, under a soft hat of lustrous black, the black curls and beard of some Galician rabbi, and then they would follow twenty yards behind him, reciting, loudly enough for him to hear, such rhymes as 'The Lord said unto Moses All Jews shall have long noses,' and 'By their schnozzles you can tell All the s---s from Isra-el.' Then the rabbi would turn and look upon them as Christ turned and looked upon Peter. From the windows of the houses dark faces looked out, and though the eyes in these faces showed a contempt for the barbarous Goyim, the lips as a rule kept their peace and answered nothing. They were the faces of a patient people who remembered pogroms in Eastern lands.

Sometimes before the boys dispersed to their homes and teas a gang-battle between Gentiles and Jews would drive along one of these streets like the flutter of dust in a high wind; but at other times both Gentile and Jewish boys had no difficulty in banding together to do battle for their common school or their common street. In these games and battles Martin was sometimes one of a gang, but a small and silent member to whom nobody was giving much attention. Usually he followed them a step or two behind, not sure that they really wanted him.

For a few months, when he was just eleven, there was never a morning that he did not cross the Commercial Road and walk towards that tolling bell without a tiny seed of fear in his heart. This was because he never knew that before the school day was over he would not have been 'mobbed' in the playground by a certain gang of boys. Ladies, I fear you must accept here the plain truth that it was a misfortune in a child of eleven to have features of unusual perfection because they made their appeal to the unripe sexual instincts of these thirteen-year-old boys.

Unaware of what stirred in them, and therefore not wholly blameworthy, a little group of these elder lads rejoiced to wait for him in the playground and there, without excuse or explanation offered, to torment him a little, as if they constituted a kind of group-cat, and he the mouse. The leader of this playful band was Frog Layton, a big, broad, flat-faced boy, much too mature for thirteen, and I, for one, do not doubt that he enjoyed the stimulation of twisting little Martin's arm behind his back or gently thwacking with a twig at his round little bottom. Who shall part young limbs and lechery?

One afternoon Martin came nervously from the lavatories where he had been hiding and, yes, there was this group-cat waiting for him on the asphalt playground. 'Here he is!' they cried. 'Gaw-lummy, he's bin hidin' in one of the bogs.'

'Collar him and take him to the other end of the playground,' ordered Frog Layton. 'Can't have him hidin'. He needs a hidin' for hidin', eh?'

'No!' protested Martin. 'Please no.'

'Go on! Take him along.'

Very willingly two of the boys caught him sternly by the wrists and the collar, like two powerful constables, and hustled him across the playground, while the rest danced and skipped like Red Indians around a captive, and Frog Layton, who was usually provided with a three-foot twig as an imitation cane, flicked at his hindquarters with it as if he were a pony or a donkey. But never so as seriously to hurt him; merely for his own excitation and enjoyment.

Thus they ran him along; and Martin, his heart racing as one imagines the mouse's heart to race when the cat's paw is on it, could not turn his head and perceive a little dark boy, with an ugly Jewish face, following, like Peter, afar off. Nor did the persecutors, merrily intent upon their victim, know anything about this little watcher trailing behind them like a shadowing detective.

They ran Martin to the far playground wall and, pushing him face-forward against it, bade him lick the rough bricks.

'Lick 'em again if you don't want a licking yerself,' ordered Frog Layton. 'That's right. Does it taste nice? *Go on; and again.*'

After he'd been submitted three times to this inexplicable treatment—how was he to know that it was his still feminine features that explained it—his response, when Frog Layton tried to force his tongue against the bricks was as masculine as

anyone could wish: he turned and fought them all like a mad-dened bull-calf, head down, fists flailing, mouth frothing. He shouted, ‘ I’ll tell my auntie of you! ’—but this only provoked jeers at the word ‘ auntie ’. A boy who had an auntie instead of a dad and a mum was a case for mockery.

‘ Who tells his auntie? ’ they derided. ‘ Who tells his auntie? ’

‘ Filthy bullies! Filthy bullies! ’ sobbed Martin, the tears aflood in his eyes. ‘ Stinking bully Frog Layton.’

‘ Here! No one calls me a filthy bully,’ announced Frog Layton. ‘ He’s got to be punished for that. Mustn’t talk to yer elders and betters like that.’ And he got Martin’s head under his arm and plied the twig to his behind in a mock-whipping. Again, however, he was careful not seriously to hurt him. Only the last swish, since it was unhappily the last, he made a good one; and it stung a little. ‘ See? ’ he explained almost apologetically. ‘ That’s what comes to little boys who are rude to Mr. Layton.’

Martin might be short for his eleven years, but the first strength of his manhood was assembling within him, both physical and mental strength; and once he was free of Frog Layton’s imprisoning arm, he resolved—with mouth so firmly set that his under-lip was turned inward beneath his teeth—to try the issue with his tormentor. He bent his head and rushed at him, dashing his right fist into Frog’s unseen face and his left into the thick body before him. In this explosive moment the thick, coarse person of Frog Layton might have been an accessible part of the Universe which, at such times of fury and spleen, Martin wanted to pummel and kick.

‘ Oh, no! ’ cried Frog Layton, when that fist crashed on his cheek bone and another bashed—most unfairly—into his stomach. ‘ Christ, no! We don’t have this; ’ and he slashed, viciously this time, at the swell of Martin’s calf.

Martin screamed with the pain of it and, bellowing, rushed again at Frog. But almost at once another boy yelled, ‘ Look out! The Gaffer! The Gaffer! ’

‘ What? ’ asked Frog, halting in his execution.

‘ Look. The Gaffer.’

The Head Teacher, having heard a scream, had come to his window and was looking their way.

‘ Damn! ’ said Frog Layton, disappointed of further vengeance.

The Head Teacher continued looking for a little, but there were fifty yards of playground between his window and that far wall, and he couldn’t see clearly what scrimmaging horse-

play was afoot at that distance; especially as the scrimmage abruptly broke in pieces, and most of the boys came walking innocently back towards the school gates. He watched them till they were out of his sight. Now only two boys remained on the playground; two of the smaller ones.

He returned to his table.

One of the two on the playground was Martin: he was walking slowly towards the gates, very slowly, because he wanted the distance to increase between himself and the boys who'd been mobbing him. And because he was ashamed of the tears still flooding his eyes.

The other was the little dark Jewish boy who had followed and watched: he now stood waiting for Martin to come nearer him.

His name: Berl Mickiewicz. Berl Mickiewicz was one of the few Jews in this Church school. The same age as Martin, he was even smaller, and very much slighter. To a Gentile eye he was astonishingly ugly, with a low forehead, long thick drooping nose, upper lip so thin that it seemed to touch his nose, and under lip so thick and protruding that it might have been the big wet lip of a sufferer from acromegaly. But the little eyes above these unlovely features were soft and kind.

Martin did not know him well. They might be of the same age, but Berl was in a higher standard, having all the precocious ability of a Jew. He was not popular in the school because, in addition to having this unnatural ability, he was extremely studious. Child of a very poor but god-fearing Jewish home, he had been adjured by his parents to take every advantage of his schooling, and he earnestly obeyed them. For this reason boys who had no such reputation for ability, and no such desire to labour at their books, called him 'Swatting Berl' and 'Holy Mike' and 'Berl the Bumsucker'. They also called him, because of his (to them) comical name, 'Old Mucky Wits' and because of his heavy and (to them) hideous features, and because they were incapable of mercy, 'Old Ugly.'

All these jibes he bore with a smile, being one of a race that was familiar with oppression. Had not his parents fled from Christian persecution in Poland and come across Europe to seek the kindness, the toleration and the justice of the English?

When Martin was near enough Berl touched him gently on the elbow. 'Never worry, Martin,' he said. 'It was a dirty shame. He's a pig, that Frog Layton. But he's gone now.'

This unexpected compassion produced a result that was both inevitable and instantaneous: the sobs exploded from between Martin's tight-pressed lips and sprayed over Berl's face; his tears fell in sudden big blobs before he could knock them away.

Berl touched his arm again. 'There now!' he said, comfortingly. 'There now!'

'I'll kill them!' Martin announced in breaks between the sobs. 'One day I'll kill that Frog Layton.'

'He'll be gone soon, Martin.'

'I'll pay him out one day. I don't care how long I wait. I'll pay him out.'

'It'll be the holidays soon, Martin, and he'll be gone next term.'

'I'll tell my dad about him. He thinks I haven't got a dad, but I have. My dad'll give him a hiding. I'll go and tell Dad tomorrow.'

But Martin knew that this was only a threat. He had lost all touch with his father far away in Tribe Street. And he suspected, as he sobbed, that his father would say, 'You fight your own battles my boy, and don't come whining to me,' concluding with the easy advice, 'Knock 'em down. That's what I should do. Give 'em as good as you get.' Suspecting this, Martin just stood there, beating back his sobs.

'Where do you live?' asked Berl. 'In Omar Square? Shall I walk home with you?'

§

A few days after this, the summer holidays having begun, Martin was walking towards Hagen Street where Berl lived. Mr. and Mrs. Mickiewicz, having been told by Berl about Martin Herriot and the way he was bullied by Frog Layton and his gang, had been moved to a compassion like their son's, and suggested that Berl should invite the poor little fellow to tea. Martin didn't want to go. He never wanted to go to a strange house, in part because his shyness of all strange people surrounded him like a belt of invisible air which he found difficult to traverse, and in part because he was now happier living inside this secret belt with dreams of greatness and fame. Besides, while accustomed to Jewish children, he was especially shy of Jewish grown-ups: this because they seemed a dark and alien people and because the Gentile fathers were apt to say that most of the crim-

inal population in East London were Jews; that, anyhow, even if they were not actual criminals, they were almost bound to be rogues and cheats in business since they believed the exaction of an exorbitant profit to be not a shameful practice but an admirable, even a virtuous; and, summing it all up, that "if a spot of dirty work had been done, you could be pretty sure there was a Jew in it somewhere." But Auntie Vera, always glad to get him out of the house and out of her way, had insisted that he must accept Berl's invitation. 'What are you afraid of?' she scoffed. 'Of course you must go. They won't eat you. You *are* a little coward sometimes.'

So, on this warm August afternoon, Martin crossed the Commercial Road, walked up St. Mary Lane, and came to the corner of Hagen Street. And directly he saw Hagen Street he recognized it as a street along which the Gentile boys, safely banded into a gang, had often scampered, shouting their anti-Jewish jibes through the door of the little shop at the corner and up at the house windows. It was a street like many another in Stepney and Whitechapel: merely two long terraces of little-low houses, each having one window by the side of its door, two windows above and a basement below lit by nothing more than a shallow window peeping above a grating in the pavement; but on this warm Friday, you saw, even if you were only eleven, that it was almost entirely inhabited by Jews. Dark-haired, dark-eyed children sat on the thresholds, or lay along them; some of their parents sat on chairs by their doors, giving the street a mid-European air; yonder a cluster of five men in black Trilby hats, three of them on the kerb and two in the gutter stood in perfervid argument, gesticulating with shoulders, elbows, hands, and heads. Never a Gentile whose shoulders jumped so high, or elbows opened so wide, or hands spread so despairingly, in a pleasant kerb-side controversy.

The little shop at the very entrance of the street proclaimed it a street of the ghetto. Martin, postponing as long as possible his arrival at the Mickiewicz home, tarried by the window of this shop and looked in. At first this was just an excuse for biding his time, but almost at once he was much interested in its dusty display. Here were little seven-branched candlesticks, phylacteries, a litter of Yiddish newspapers and Yiddish songs, and a vast clutter of books: Judaica books in English and foreign languages, Hebrew bibles, Hebrew prayer-books, a pyramid of Jewish novels, and a further pyramid built of the works of famous

Jewish rabbis and philosophers, its summit crowned by an opened copy of Maimonides' *Moreh Nebuchim*, or *The Guide of the Perplexed*. More strangely, there was a little cairn in the corner composed of books by the enemies of Israel with a card at its foot saying 'Books of Anti-Semitic Bias.' What this meant Martin did not know, but he read a few of the titles: *The Jewish Peril*, *Moses or the Menace in our Midst*, *The Hidden Shylocracy*, and *The Protocols of the Learned Elders of Zion*. Martin was fascinated by this last title and when he forced himself to leave the shop-window, he walked along the street repeating it.

You could not walk along that street without encountering evidence that nearly all its people were engaged in the clothing trade. Men and women came out of houses carrying gowns on hangers or piles of overcoats on their arms. You could look in at open ground-floor windows and see that some of the householders were small masters with little workrooms in their homes: Martin looked through a window that had once been a shop-window and saw four women seated at their treadle-machines, a youth at work on a baster's bench, and two dummies standing stupidly in front of the finishing hand's table. The women were singing a Yiddish song as they worked their machines.

No. 31 was Berl's home and Martin, more than ever shy now, slowed his steps as he came towards it. Was that Berl's dad sitting on a canvas stool against his doorpost and reading in a big black book? Yes, it was; it must be; and not only because the figure 31 was on the half-open door but because that little fat man in the black pill-box cap was exactly like Berl. He was Berl enlarged by a magnifying glass—but not enlarged very far. There was Berl's nose, long and pendent enough to be a Gentile's burlesque of an Hebraic nose; the brief upper lip almost hidden under the nose, and the underlip so thick and protuberant as to compete with the nose for the honour of being the most striking feature in the face. This was a face for boys to shout after in the street.

The little man's eyes, rising above the spectacles seated on his nose, saw Martin.

'Ah!' he said. 'You are the little Martin Herriot, I think. You are very velcom. Berl, my boy, here is your little friend Martin; we are very glad that you come to see us. Irena—Irena, my dear—Rachel Irena, where are you?—here is the little Martin Herriot. Come and make him velcom.'

Mrs. Mickiewicz came hurrying from her kitchen, and Martin

thought that in her fashion she was as beautiful as her husband and son were hideous. A large plump woman, with round soft face and large soft black eyes, she gave him a radiant smile as she said, ‘Come in, my dear.’ To Berl, who’d come running behind her she said, not for Martin’s hearing, but he heard it and hated it, ‘Ach, Berl, but he’s quite lovely! ’

Martin followed them into the narrow passage, and Mr. Mickiewicz came behind, carrying his big black book under his arm.

‘Come into the parlour,’ invited Mrs. Mickiewicz at the door of the front room, turning to smile sweetly at their guest.

This ‘parlour’ was a tiny little room full of cheap brown furniture and cheap coloured china. It was as tidy and clean as if everything in it were straight from the shop, and it smelt to the ceiling of furniture cream and floor polish. The small square table was spread with a lace cloth, the best tea-things, and two plates of the brightest, shiniest cakes. Even at eleven years old Martin could perceive that he was being treated with honour as a parlour guest.

‘Sit down, my dear,’ said Mrs. Mickiewicz, ‘while I get you some tea, and then you and Mr. Mickiewicz and Berl can play some games, eh?’

Martin sat obediently on the nearest chair. Two emotions were his as he sat down. One was that he didn’t feel the least afraid of Mr. and Mrs. Mickiewicz but, on the contrary, comfortably at ease with them; and the other that for the first time in his life he was feeling shame for his own dirty, slatternly, sour-smelling home. This was the moment when he began to be revolted by it.

When they were all seated at tea Mr. and Mrs. Mickiewicz talked to him less as a child than as their equal and contemporary, and he found himself answering all their questions about his interests and ambitions with delight and fluency.

He would like to be some sort of artist, he said.

‘Then you will be an artist if you want it enough,’ said Mr. Mickiewicz.

‘He’s awfully good at drawing,’ Berl reported. ‘Teacher says so.’

‘Goot,’ said Mr. Mickiewicz, nodding.

And he wanted to make a lot of money, said Martin, much encouraged.

‘Ach, money is not all,’ declared Mr. Mickiewicz. ‘There

are bigger things in life than money. Excuse me, but you be an artist, my dear, and never mind so much about the money.'

Then Mrs. Mickiewicz, making affectionate fun of her husband, told Martin with a laugh that her Solomon had certainly never made no money. Not in all his life, he hadn't. Her Solomon, she explained, was a market worker with a pitch for his second-hand clothes stall in the Flack Lane Market, but he never made no money because he wouldn't cheat. Sometimes he could hardly bring himself to take a fair profit.

'Oh, I take a fair profit,' her husband corrected her. 'You bet I do, but certainly no more. No, no.' And he turned his little bespectacled eyes towards Martin. 'Better to feel clean inside, my dear, than to have plenty much money all around you. It's this that matters——' here he touched his breast—'not this——' and he touched the pocket on his fat little thigh.

'Yah. Yah, yah. So many ef our people are so wrong,' explained Mrs. Mickiewicz, still talking to him as if he were an adult. 'Those who have a trade, even if it's in a sweat-shop, pretend to despise a market-worker, but only just as long as he don't make no money. Once he makes money they admire and envy him and pity themselves in their sweat-shop. The real question with them is not what you do, but whether you are making money at it. See? That's all that matters. Money. See?'

Martin nodded as one who saw and thought this very wrong.

'Irena, she knows,' said Mr. Mickiewicz, chewing a cake. 'She has been for a long time a finishing hand in Mr. Weissberg's workshop and she hears vot they say. It is she vot makes the money,' he added, looking affectionately at her. 'She has always gone out to verk for our Berl's sake, so that he's never vonted for nothing. She makes quite good money in the season but——' and here he shot his shoulders as high as his ears—'nothing—nothing very much in the slack.'

Martin had no answer ready, but his eyes over his fourth cake said, 'What a pity.'

'Yes, we are poor, I'm afraid,' Mr. Mickiewicz continued, 'and shall always be poor, but I am just a little proud of our name. Mickiewicz is the name of a very great poet in Poland, who sang about the sufferings of my people, and—excuse me, it is nonsense, perhaps, but I like to think that we—we here in Hagen Street, Irena and Berl and me—are of his family.'

At this 'nonsense' he smiled and put his head on one side.

‘I read him all,’ he said, ‘and I love him. He speaks for me my mind—my heart.’

Then Mrs. Mickiewicz, as was natural, spoke a little of her Berl and his ambitions. She spoke better English than her husband, perhaps because she circulated more among the Gentiles. ‘We hope our Berl will do big things one day. I don’t see why he shouldn’t. He is very clever, always reading and reading, and his teacher says he’s a long way in front of boys who are older than him. I’m sure that even now, at eleven, he reads books that I shouldn’t care to read. It would be nice if Berl did something big in the world.’

Mr. Mickiewicz nodded—and nodded again—and then shook his head. ‘But I do not think it is easy to get on in the vurld unless you cheat a little. Joost a little. And we hope our Berl will never cheat. It’s not vurth it—not vurth it——’ and little Mr. Mickiewicz waved all such blind stupidity away.

Then the tea-things were removed, and a wall of webbing fixed around the table so that Martin and Berl and Mr. Mickiewicz could play Table Croquet with tiny hoops, balls, sticks and mallets. And very exciting these games became, little Mr. Mickiewicz dancing and shouting and cheering as loudly as either of the boys. But it was remarkable how often he looked like winning and then made a number of silly strokes, tut-tutting at his failure, so that in the end Martin, his guest, won, or Berl, his son. Whereupon he would throw back his head and laugh at his stupid clumsiness, and say, ‘Vell, vell, I *am* a fool. I vos doin’ quite vell. And now *you’ve* been and won.’

Berl, eager as Martin, made no such mistakes.

Then, somehow, all games were over, and they were just sitting around and chatting, with Mrs. Mickiewicz among them, having finished her washing-up. And a strange thing was that in this clean little room, and among these friendly people, Martin was quite happy to be just sitting and talking. He had quite forgotten that they were Jews, who should seem foreign and sinister and contemptible. He even felt something like a love for them all, a most pleasant feeling. He was more pleased than displeased, more interested than put to shame, when Mrs. Mickiewicz said, ‘My Berl tells me that some of the little boys at the school are unkind to you. That is so, is it not?’

Little! thought Martin. Frog Layton *little!* Did such boys really seem little to Mrs. Mickiewicz? (Perhaps this was Martin’s first perception of relativity.) Aloud he said ‘Yes, they are

filthy bullies, Frog Layton and his gang. But,' he added proudly, 'I fought them. I fought 'em fr'all I was worth. Didn't I, Berl?'

'Yepp,' said Berl, nodding.

'I slammed into 'em. Berl knows I did. He was watching.'

'So?' Mr. Mickiewicz took off his spectacles and wiped them, half closing the uncovered eyes that he might study Martin better. 'He slammed 'em, Irena, my dear.'

'Yes, I did. I socked Frog Layton as hard as I could. I gave him just what he gave me, I did.'

'You did? There now! Well, that's natural at your age,' said Mrs. Mickiewicz, and he was immediately disappointed that she gave him only this faint praise. 'And now I think you must not worry about these boys any more. They have left school now, Berl tells me.'

'Frog Layton has left, but he still lives in Griffin Street, and one day I'm going to get my own back on him properly.'

'Ach, no!' muttered Mr. Mickiewicz; but his wife only smiled and inquired, 'And when will that be?'

'I don't care how long I wait,' declared Martin, still proud of his words. 'I shall be as big as him one day, and then I'll go and remind him who I am and what he done to me once. And I shall bash him properly for it: knock him down.'

'I see.' Mrs. Mickiewicz continued to smile.

'There'll be nothing to choose between us when I'm eighteen and he's twenty. I reckon I'll be as strong as him, if not stronger.'

'Eighteen.' It was Mr. Mickiewicz speaking. He put back his spectacles and looked through them at Martin. He moved his chair a little closer. His eyes were smiling. 'You would wait seven years for your vengeance, eh, my dear? Seven long years. The same time that Jacob served for his Rachel, because he loved her so. Seven long, long years.'

'I don't care how long I wait,' affirmed Martin, not quite happily, indeed almost sullenly, because he was beginning to suspect that his audience had not approved of his fine words but were making a sport of them. This was particularly disappointing, just when he felt he was loving the Mickiewiczes and being a success with them.

'In seven years, my dear,' said Mr. Mickiewicz, 'I hope you will have seen that there is a better way of conquering your enemies than that.'

'What is it?' asked Martin, quite interested to learn some better way of avenging himself on Frog Layton. What could it be? How could you conquer your enemies except by hitting them harder than they hit you?'

'Vy—don't you see?—you do not give them what they give you, but you try to do in every way the opposite of vot they done to you. And so you conquer their silly hearts!'

'Oh, no!' said Martin. This simply wasn't sense.

'Ach, but you are too young to understand; excuse me, it is too difficult for you to see. Maybe you will see it ven you are grown up, but many people—most people, eh, Irena?—never grow up enough to see it. They are still eleven years old when they are sixty. But ven you do see it, my dear, you no longer wonder if it is true, or anything like that. You just *know* it is true. You see it as plain as you see the sun shining before you, and if someone vants to argue with you that there's no sun up there, vell, you joost don't know vot to say! The time comes ven you know it for the truth as you know that this is a table and that is your wife. It is joost there in front of you.' And he smiled at Martin, who didn't know what he was talking about.

'Yah,' and Mr. Mickiewicz nodded many times. 'In seven years I hope you will see that these boys were not really vicked but just very young. And very, very silly. See vot I mean?'

Martin did not see, but so completely at ease was he in this room that he didn't at all mind starting upon a question that had come into his head as he remembered his Scripture lessons and his Wednesday morning services. 'But wasn't it Jesus Christ who said all that, and I thought that Jews——' but here he stopped, suddenly ashamed to go on.

'He vos a Jew too,' said Mr. Mickiewicz.

'Yes, but. . . .'

'But the Jews crucified him, you vont to say, eh? Ach, yes, all men of all races have crucified their hest. But for me—vy, I am proud he vos a Jew. I would like to be like him. I hope my Berl vill be like him. We tell Berl always to be proud that he is of the same race as that young man, and a Jew.'

'Yah. Very proud,' agreed Mrs. Mickiewicz. 'There was nothing much that young man didn't know, and we are proud of him.'

'I expect you hear many things about us dirty Jews, eh?' asked Mr. Mickiewicz, one eye half closing.

Obviously Martin could not say ‘ Yes ’ to this, but his staring silence said it for him.

‘ Yes, I see that you do and, alas, some of it is deserved, I think. But not all, Martin, not all. You must try to think well of us because you are going to be Berl’s friend, I know. We want you to like us. Listen, my dear: Berl, unlike his old father and grandfather, is an Englishman born, and I tell him there is nothing finer for a boy to be than both a Jew boy and an Englishman. Yah, I know that some of the English, the very silly ones, jeer at us and sometimes shout rude things at us—yes, yes—but these are words only. Compared with any other people, you English are so kindly and so tolerant. It is your England that twenty years ago took my Irena and me, and many others into her midst, like she was a sanctuary, and has let us dwell here ever since, and make a little living here in quietness and peace. She has not beaten us or killed us or sent us away into captivity. And so I tell Berl that he must always be a good and loyal Englishman, serving his country well, because his old father and mother owe England more than ever they can repay; and at the same time he must always be a good Jew, not because his old father was one before him, but because he feels in his little Jewish bones that Judaism is a great and good thing and that he must never do anything to bring shame upon it or upon our nation. Do you see? ’

§

When Martin left school at fourteen years old he ended a career that was rather worse than undistinguished. Other boys had taken scholarships, or were being fattened for scholarships, and he was not even in the top standard when he packed up his school books, and, to his joy, Academic Instruction had done with him. An old teacher who remembers him says that he was a ‘ lazy and backward boy and in his last year refractory.’ When I asked him what he meant by ‘ in his last year ’ he said, ‘ In the beginning I liked him immensely. I found him an attractive little boy, unusually responsive to kindness and possessing a very fair intelligence. But he didn’t turn out well. He developed strangely, becoming slothful and silent and far too self-enclosed for a boy.’

For the laziness, at least, I could plead three things in mitigation of sentence: that he must often have been tired as he sat at

his books, though possibly he did not know this; that he was undernourished, though, again, he may not have felt this; and, lastly, what of that stale, foul'd air in his home?

Directly the Law allowed it, and in fact a little sooner than this, Auntie Vera sent him out into the streets before, between, and after school hours, to earn every shilling that a child could gather, explaining in voluble self-justification, ‘It’s only fair. Your dad’s ten shillings don’t begin to pay for what you cost me. I don’t know how he supposes I can manage. But what does *he* care?’ So at about seven in the morning, with very little breakfast inside him, Martin went out into the cold fresh streets and delivered newspapers for Mr. Storey of Benn Street. Mr. Storey’s customers were scattered far and wide, and it took Martin an hour to empty his bag of papers. For this service Mr. Storey gave him a shilling a week. At mid-day between school hours, and in the evening after them, he did errands for Putnam’s Provision Stores in Cable Street, with a heavy basket on his arm. This earned him five shillings a week. On Saturday mornings, in addition to the newspaper round, he lit fires at a penny a time for a number of strict Jews who obeyed the rabbinical law, ‘Thou shalt not kindle a fire upon the Sabbath.’ And when he was not out on such part-time jobs, there was little room in the house where he could rest. Whenever possible, Auntie Vera, not wanting him in her messed and littered kitchen, urged him out on to the pavement to play; and when at last—probably after ten o’clock—he lay on his bedboard he had small hope of continuous sleep till she had finished pottering around or had returned, drunk or sober, from the public house. Nor was the bedboard easy lying.

I doubt if Auntie Vera, who had some fragments of a conscience, allowed herself to know that he was under-nourished. She persuaded herself that his meals were adequate. But what were they? For his breakfast and tea he had little but bread and cheap jam, and tea with condensed milk; for his dinner a twopenny meat pie from the Stewed Eel and Pie House, or perhaps a twopenny piece of fish and a pennyworth of chips from Meyer’s Classic Fish Bar. Auntie Vera didn’t like the trouble of cooking.

Extraordinary that upon such nourishment could have been built the short but powerful frame I knew.

All that he earned by his out-of-school labours Auntie Vera took from his hand as he brought it in, insisting, with small,

suspicious, watching eyes, that he accounted for every penny. Unscrupulous herself in money matters, she could not suppose that he would be other than unscrupulous, if possible. Sometimes her compassion, or her guilt, stirred as she took it, and she would give him a penny for her own peace. For this he would say fervently, ‘Oh, *thank* you, Auntie!’ and straightway run out to spend it.

§

Secretly Martin was not a little humiliated by his notable failure at school. It rankled, compelling him for years afterwards to profess a contempt for the usual type of lad who won scholarships or other academic distinctions: they were slave types, he would say; timid, amenable, and easily tamed; passive negative characters, of whom nothing much, as a rule, was ever heard after their school or college days were over; whereas the more positive characters, who had too much guts to be driven by their teachers, often passed the little swats in the long run. Nearly all the greatest men had done badly at school.

So for his comfort Martin invested his lack of distinction at school with the promise of high distinction hereafter. He gave himself to dreams of greatness and vaguely imagined, either that he had plenty of time in which to achieve the greatness, or that it would come to him somehow without any serious effort made. Seldom, perhaps, has such an immense determination to impress people one day cohabited with such a lazy leaving of all effort till some ever-receding tomorrow.

§

His first job after leaving school was that of lather boy at Mark’s Gents’ Hairdressing, a small shop at the corner of Spanish Street, and very proud he was, in his first weeks, to be no longer a boy going off to school but a youth going out to work. But in fact he had only changed from a day-dreaming schoolboy into a day-dreaming lather boy, with the result that Mark Goldman, after only a month or so, sent him and his last wages home to his auntie. He told Auntie Vera, ‘He ain’t smart enough for me, not by no means. Oh, no! It’s a smart lad I advertised for; not someone who’s always in a dream. I’m sorry, Mrs. Langley, but he don’t seem on the spot to me.

D'y you think he's all there? He's clumsy with his hands, he is. It aggravates the customers, sloshing lather up their noses and in their ear 'oles. What's worse, he's saucy to me. What I mean is, he's inclined to sulk if you say a word to him; and I don't like a sulky boy about; I don't ever—see what I mean?' And Auntie Vera, after hearing this, lifted her voice at the boy. 'I don't know what we're going to do with you. I don't see how you're ever going to earn a living, straight I don't—not if you don't try. Don't you *want* to get on? At this rate you'll end by being a beggar on the streets, and let me tell you you can be put in prison for begging. Yes, you can. Ask somebody for twopence and you get seven days instead. Beg for one sort of copper, and you get the copper all right, but it ain't the one you meant. Or, rather, it ain't *you* that gets the copper, it's the copper that gets you. Put it like that.'

In his next job he was much happier and much more successful. The job was got for him by Irena Mickiewicz: it was that of errand boy to a Draper's and Outfitter's, John Dawson and Sons, in the Commercial Road. It was hard work (or would have been if Martin had done it properly) but to Mrs. Mickiewicz, who worked in a sweat-shop, hard work was neither abnormal nor wrong; and as for Auntie Vera, she declared, 'It'll do him good to be really made to work for once in his life.'

When he arrived in the morning before the shop opened, he had to rake out the boiler in the basement, sweep the shop floor, dust its counters, wall-fittings and show-cases, clean the large plate-glass windows, and then, the shop being opened to the world, mount upstairs and sweep out the stockrooms and brush the stairs.

Yes, hard work at first, but not at the pace which he took it when his first enthusiasm was spent. Mostly, too, it was work that could be done dreaning, with broom or brush, duster or cloth, in hand.

The next part of his daily labour he usually enjoyed. It consisted in fetching parcels or carrying them, and thus much of it was done out of the shop's sight, and at his own chosen speed. He was sent to fetch clothes from the mantle and gown manufacturers, the wholesalers, the small Jew master-tailors, the ill-conditioned sweat-shops—from all those varied homes of the Clothing Trade which crowd together outside the gates of the City, from Aldgate and Bishopsgate to Stepney Green and

Bow. Or he delivered parcels to customers' houses in East London and beyond. To homes near-by he went on a bicycle, imagining all the way that this machine was a glistening motor-car and that his fingers on the handlebars were pressing instruments to increase its speed. To homes more distant he might go by bus or by Underground. If he took a bus, he loved to climb with his parcels to a seat on the upper deck and there look down on the endless, marching pageant in the streets below. The more he saw of men and women in the streets, of fine cars and luxurious shops and grand banking palaces, the more he dreamed of fame and wealth one day. So deep were his reveries sometimes that he went far past his destination and had to scramble down with his parcels, leaving the dreams on the deck above.

Once, travelling along Fleet Street and the Strand he saw the statue of Dr. Johnson in St. Clement's churchyard and, just beyond it, the exceedingly handsome monument to Mr. Gladstone. And he dreamed then of statues being put up to him after he was dead. He chose Omar Square as an obvious site for one such statue, and he pictured it in the centre of the Square's railed garden : a massive ornamented pedestal with his seated figure above, rapt in thought.

§

Three years he spent at John Dawson's and so became seventeen, and a young man with no small interest in his virile appearance and no small opinion of his abilities. He had lately, under the influence of Bert, discovered books, and very proud he was of the kind of books he got from the Public Free Library: books on Art, Literature, Natural Science, World History, and Sociology. He was now a Socialist and a teetotaller, but chiefly, in both manifestations, to shock his father who was a brewer's cellarman. At seventeen, if his body was too short, it was exceptionally wide-shouldered and strong, and above it was a face that many a girl and woman had called 'wonderfully handsome' or, if they were foolish, 'divine.'

It was at this moment of his pride that all his carefree and idle optimism, and all the hopes of his youth, were rent from him. The palace of his dreams was shot around him into dust.

§

Over the whole country a great trade depression lay like a still fog. In this drear haze factory chimneys stood unsmoking, cranes hung motionless above the docks, mills were unlit and silent, shipyards unnaturally quiet, and shops which had 'thrown in the towel' shuttered and empty and for sale. At street corners in every working-class area lolled groups of idle young men, depressed and disillusioned—silent and sour-lipped and angry. Among the few busy places were the Labour Exchanges; here clerks were ceaselessly employed and long queues of anxious, despondent men shuffled towards the counters marked 'Situations Vacant' or 'New Claims.'

At John Dawson's young Mr. Robert Dawson, who at thirty had succeeded his father, Mr. John, as the effective manager of the business (Mr. John having retired from the din of the Commercial Road to the peace of Pitlow Woods in Surrey) was very much the new broom sweeping the business clean of every unnecessary expense. A most threatening time, this; and in Mr. Robert's eyes no economy in overheads was too small to be adopted. Resting on his broom (so to say) and looking where else to sweep, he cast an eye on Martin Herriot. He saw a big broad-shouldered young man, and two emotions thereupon possessed him: a faint shame that he should be paying this full-grown and handsome young man fifteen shillings a week, and a perception that he could save at least five of these shillings, and possibly ten, if he got rid of the conscience-worrying lad. Like the Earl of Strafford his policy was 'Thorough'; look after the pence everywhere and the pounds will take care of themselves. Half the success in big businesses was achieved by paring down costs to fractions of a penny. If five or ten shillings could be saved, it must be saved—but what excuse for dismissal could he offer to this lad who'd served his firm for three years? Well, well—no sentiment in business; and on a Friday pay-day he called Martin into his little office.

'Herriot,' he said, 'you are now too old to be a mere errand boy. You agree to that, don't you? You must, I think.'

'Yes, sir,' said Martin; and a hope seized him that Mr. Robert was going to offer him some less humble and better paid job.

'Yes. You're too big for it altogether.' Mr. Robert's voice was low and soft: soft to the ear as velvet to the touch. 'In your own interest you should consider looking out for a better job. You should, Herriot, really, you know.'

Martin's hope, which had shot up so suddenly, turned about and began to fall. 'Yes, sir.'

'I only wish we had something to offer you—there's nothing I'd have liked better than to find you something worth your while with us—but just now we haven't anything, Herriot—anything at all. Alas, no: we haven't. Trade is very bad—never been so bad—as you know. It's the same everywhere. Ask anyone. Of course you realise that we could get a half-timer to do your work at five shillings a week, but so far I haven't liked to do that. I have kept you on, as you know. There was no need for me to do this, but I did. You appreciate that, I expect, don't you? Look, Herriot, I will do this for you; I am most anxious to do everything I can to help you. You can stay here another month—no, I'll make it *two* months, if you like—while you look around for work more suitable to your age, or you can go the minute you find it. I shouldn't dream of standing in your way. Now good luck to you, my boy. Every good luck.'

At first Martin's youthful optimism and conceit protected him from the blow's full force. He found no suitable job in Mr. Robert's period of grace, but when it was over he signed on at the Labour Exchange, cheerfully enough, refusing to believe that the disaster of total unemployment which had overtaken so many other boys had now come for him. No work for him anywhere any more? It was an unimaginable thought.

But in this now desperately overcrowded labour market what work was there for a poorly educated youth who had neither a trade nor money nor any influential friend? Day after day he went along the Commercial Road, and the Whitechapel and Mile End Roads, searching the windows of shops, restaurants, cafés, and warehouses for cards advertising 'Strong Boy Wanted', or 'Smart Youth Wanted' and finding none. Had such a vacancy been announced, it would have been filled in an hour, twenty or thirty youths, both strong and smart, competing for it. Passing John Dawson's one day he learned from the fifteen-year-old youth cleaning the windows that Mr. Robert had employed the half-timer at five shillings a week for only a month and now employed this full-timer at ten shillings a week. He had kicked Martin out to save five shillings.

A few weeks of this bootless hunting, and the optimism was dead. But not the conceit. He knew now that his unemployment would be chronic, and the wound to his vanity only caused it to swell. He, a reader of fine and difficult books, a student of

History and Art, of Science and Sociology, had been cast out to rot like refuse on a wasteground. Jobs there were for girls, silly, shrill, empty-headed girls who'd never read anything: jobs in workshops, retail shops, and factories; but for most boys, no matter how well read and intelligent, there were none. The more his vanity suffered, the more it wrapped him about with shame and bitterness. He was ashamed to be seen in working hours by people sitting in their doorways; he crossed roads quickly to avoid the eyes of a friend coming along the pavement; he turned his face away if he stood in the queue of workless at the Exchange and saw someone he knew approaching; he stayed in his bed as long as possible, and in these hours of self-imprisonment read passionately—the more passionately because he wanted to enlarge his grievance by enlarging the quality of a brain for which the world had no use.

From his window, or from his doorway, he watched on many an evening the lads in work taking their girls to dances or cinemas; and the lads were prinked up in their best because they had money to spend. He had to give every shilling of his dole to Auntie Vera for his shelter and food, and daily she deplored its inadequacy. Would he ever again be able to buy a new suit or a new gay shirt like that one yonder? He was eighteen now, and he saw girls' faces which quickened desire, and even a tender love, but in his pride he kept apart from them that they might not know of his shame. He vowed that he would walk out with no young lady till he could give her all that other boys gave their young ladies. And that would probably be never.

§

One morning, sauntering hopelessly along the Commercial Road, he walked into Berl Mickiewicz.

‘Berl!’ he called, because Berl, head down and pensive, had not seen him.

‘Martin! Gracious! Haven’t seen you for years! What is it: nearly two years? Where’ve you been?’

‘And you too, old Berl, what have you been doing with yourself? I’d forgotten your existence.’

He looked him up and down. How small Berl seemed: his smallness more noticeable now than when he was eleven, or when he was sixteen, because now he had the face of a young

man and the neat black moustache of a young man, and his suit was so elaborately that of a young dandy. It was a suit of pale café-au-lait, shaped into the waist and swinging out over the hips. Its lapels were wide, and there were lapels on its waistcoat too. A fellow of simple goodness Berl might be, but, like most young Jews, he fancied clothes of a somewhat showy colour and cut. And in Berl's case, thought Martin, there were two other good reasons why he should want bright garments—his smallness and his ugliness. And, lord, was he ugly? What shapely or showy suit could outweigh that heavy-nosed, thick-lipped ugliness? And now this suit, so shapely and bright for its first week or two, was stretched and baggy and stained. A cheap suit of poor heart and little stamina.

'Doing with myself?' replied Berl. 'Doing nothing. Just precisely nothing.'

'Well, where are you off to row, Berly?' Martin felt a strong affection for him, because he had not seen him for so long, and because he was so ugly, and because he himself was sad. 'What do you think you're doing?'

'Looking for work. Aren't you?'

'Certainly. Who isn't?'

'You any hope of finding any?'

'None.'

'Nor have I,' sighed Berl.

'Crikey! You one of the dole-boys too? How's your mum, and the old man, Berl?'

'Dad's nearly always ill now, but Mother, she's all right. What we'd do without her I don't know. What with going out to work and letting lodgings, she keeps the roof over our heads.'

'In Hagen Street still?'

'Yes. Same old house.'

'Berl, I never thought *you'd* get out of work—you, the bright star of St. Mary Lane School. God, things must be even worse than I thought, if they can't find a job for you.' He remembered Berl's mother pouring out her hopes that their Berl might 'do something big in the world'. Dreadful indeed must be the depression if there was no place in the world for Berl. He himself had been a rather idle good-for-nothing, but Berl! Berl who had read everything, Berl who was as studious and conscientious as he was brilliant, Berl who would be the most honest and loyal of employees! Then of a sudden it occurred to him that perhaps Berl's smallness and ugliness and exaggerated

Jewishness had all helped the doors to shut in his face. If this was so, it was a shame; a wicked shame. He put his arm affectionately into Berl's. 'Well, you won't find any work, just looking on the ground, old boy. Why, you didn't even see me! You missed Martin Herriot. Come: it's done me good, seeing you again; the first decent thing that's happened for weeks. Perhaps it's a good omen. Let's go and look for work together. Who knows? One day we may find some, and it would be nice if we could work somewhere on the same bench. I've half a feeling we shall.'

As they walked along together that morning Berl talked of all that he'd done since he left school. He had been obliged to go out to work at once because at that time his father was ill and earning nothing. At fourteen he'd gone into Mr. Kaplowich's workshop as a learner at sixpence a week; after a time he'd become a 'hand', helping a baster, a presser, or a machiner, and for this he had been paid at the daily rate. His parents, though making but small money themselves, had allowed him to keep his earnings and spend them on clothes and other comforts. Nearly always he had been 'put off' in the slack season; and now it seemed he'd been put off for ever.

Hunting as a couple Martin and Berl did on odd days find odd jobs; partly, as it seemed to Martin, because Yids were more loyal to their less fortunate brethren than Goys were. Or perhaps it was that so many of them loved Mr. and Mrs. Mickiewicz and Berl. A Jewish builder, restoring and redecorating a house in Great Eastern Street, took them on for a few days as casual labourers. Two street traders in Petticoat Lane allowed them to squeeze in between their pitches with trays of toys bought from a wholesaler in Houndsditch. The little Jewish bookseller at the corner of Hagen Street gave Berl some of his second-hand books to sell in the same bazaar at a small commission. I know not how much of this help was legal; it may be that some of Berl's brethren preferred loyalty to legality, and were not wholly wrong in doing so.

Apart from these jobs, put in their way by good neighbours, they earned some sixpences by carrying bags for passengers at Liverpool Street Station, and once or twice got casual work at the docks. But far more often they went to the wharf gates at seven o'clock only to find a crowd of workless waiting there, for most of whom there was no more chance of passing through the gates than for mortal sinners to nip through the gates of

Heaven. At about seven-forty-five the gates opened and, when the wharf had sucked in all it could swallow, they closed in the faces of the unwanted. Martin and Berl were at their homes again by eight o'clock.

Once, and once only they earned three shillings for a day's work as sandwichmen. In the hope of getting this work they would go at five in the morning down a narrow arched passage to a courtyard behind some shops. Usually, even at this twilight hour, there was a queue of twenty or thirty men outside the agent's door, and by seven the yard was almost as crowded with men of little hope as the roadway outside the dock gates. Many a time the agent would appear at his door and announce, 'No work.' If there *was* work he usually chose to give it to the old grey men, passing over able-bodied youngsters like Martin and Berl. But this once, on this windy morning heavy with cloud, the old men in the yard were few. Old hands, they knew what happened to the board above their heads when it caught the wind like a fore-skysail. And so there was work for all this morning. Martin and Berl took their sandwich boards and slung them over their shoulders, first closing up their mufflers and turning up their overcoat collars against the cold blast. Because of that board above their heads the framework was heavy on their shoulders, as they walked in Indian file out of the yard and into the roadway and the wind. Martin walked behind Berl, and as they went slowly along the gutters of the Mile End Road he either essayed to entertain Berl with bitter and cynical remarks or, forgetting Berl and all East London, walked in silence with dreams of greatness.

Sometimes he awoke from a dream to see on the pavement someone he knew, and then he bent his head so that his chin went deep into his choker, and the peak of his cap partly obscured his face.

The wind mounted with the morning. It blew behind them towards the East, and their boards, especially the one on high, caught it like sails so that they were driven along the gutter, their curses travelling ahead of them down the wind. The board above their heads sometimes blew forward over their caps, chafing their shoulders, hurrying their feet, and galling their tempers.

'God in Heaven!' muttered Martin to Berl. There was no need for him to shout, because his words went down-wind to his precursor. 'Berl, give me some Hebrew or Yiddish oaths.

I've used all my English ones a hundred times, and there's no virtue left in them.'

Berl turned to reply with some jest and was nearly blown from gutter to pavement, as the wind struck his boards at a new angle. Then he certainly used some oath, but Martin could not hear it: it went away like an autumn leaf flying in the arms of the wind.

'And am I sick of this blasted Sale?' said Martin. The sandwich boards advertised a sale at a big stores in the Mile End Road. 'Your boards are all I've had to read for the last two hours. And they now pall. I rather wish I were dead. But if I've got to read 'em, Berly, you might keep them still. They're dancing about in the most unruly fashion.'

'Please don't keep on trying to be funny,' shouted Berl over his shoulder. 'I can't stand it. Not in this wind.'

Walking on, hands in his overcoat pockets or joined behind his back, Martin looked up at the sky and saw the clouds scudding towards the East and the streamers of smoke from street chimneys racing each other and occasionally whirling round, all together, like migrant birds changing flight. There was the noise of a rushing in the plane-trees as their leaves protested, along with Martin and his fellows, against the bullying wind. Litter and waste scampered along the gutter at their sides.

'Berl. Berly,' whispered Martin, calling his attention.

'Yes. What the hell is it? What now?'

'Do you see all these bits of litter and refuse blowing along the gutter?'

'I do.'

'Well, do you see much difference between them and us?'

'I don't.'

'Thank you. Nor do I.'

When they turned about to parade along the north-side gutters the work was heavier because they were now breasting the wind and the dust and grit was assaulting their eyeballs. Now Martin did not want even to speak; much less to joke. They pushed on; pushed on; silent save for their intermittent oaths. But ahead of them in the far west there was a glamour of gold on the underside of the racing clouds, and it promised better things soon. And indeed there was a sudden fall of the wind, followed by diffident outbreaks of the sun.

For ten hours they walked the gutters of Whitechapel and Stepney, not daring to pause or remove their boards, for at any

moment the inspector might arrive to see that they were performing properly the work for which they had been paid. Since they were paid three shillings at the end of the day, the rate for the job was threepence-halfpenny an hour. After this day in the wind Martin and Berl were not again offered a job, and so at length they came no more to the yard.

§

Martin was not yet nineteen, and there was one time when the optimism of youth rose suddenly from its grave again. It stood up, eagerly alive. It was Berl who made the dry bones live. Loafing among other workless lads opposite a barber's shop at the corner of Wick Street, and sometimes sitting on its window ledge, they were discussing their hopes and despairs, when Berl said, 'Even with a trad. like mine, there's not much hope; without one, as in your case, there's none. You've got to get a training of some sort. I always thought you'd do something in Art. Commercial Art, perhaps. Do you remember how old Soapy Stevens said you were the best drawer in the class?'

'Yes; and the biggest fool,' Martin reminded him.

'Well, is there no chance of your doing something in that line?'

'What chance, pray? I've no money to pay fees at an art school. And how should I keep myself for two or three years without earning anything. Talk sense, old boy.'

'Wouldn't your dad do something? He's in good work.'

'So likely! You don't know my dad.'

'Well, then, there are evening classes and you could try for a scholarship. If you got a scholarship, with all your fees paid for you, surely he'd be a bit proud and help you a little. At a stretch you could probably manage on ten bob a week and earn a little extra out of school hours. Mike Lowy, who's a scholarship pupil, told me that the Council send any art work they want done to the School, and the headmaster gives it, as often as not, to students who need the money. Mike says he earned several quids drawing huge diagrams of horrible diseases for a Borough Health Week. He also does sign-writing for some of the shopkeepers who want it done on the cheap, in these hard times. Don't you think that if you told your old man all this he'd see you safe for a little? You could promise to pay it all back in a year or two.'

'God!' exclaimed Martin. 'I wonder if there's anything in that. He's got plenty of money just now. Only the other day he was bragging to Auntie Vera that he'd managed to put a tidy lot by since he'd had no brats to pay for. Oh, I wonder if he'd—'

No harm in asking him. Surely a father earning good money would help him to the extent of ten bob a week, if it was only a loan. 'I'll swear to pay it all back one day. He might do it—he might.' Optimism on its feet again he dared to hope this, to believe it, to dream fine things, as he sped along the roads towards Tribe Street where his father lodged with sister Genevieve. He even prayed to some God, in case such a Being were there, looking down upon Stepney. 'Please, please make him do it. Just this once.' Full of faith in his ability as an artist—'the best drawer in the class'—he saw himself with a trade. A trade! A poster artist? A book illustrator? A sign writer? An art teacher? He would be a lad with a trade. About lads who had a trade he felt much as boys from a public school who have not been able to go on to the university feel about those who have their Oxford or Cambridge degree.

'Please, please . . . make him do it.'

He found his father seated in much comfort, feet up, waist-coat undone, grey hairs adrift, pipe smoking, in Genevieve's cosy little parlour.

'Hallo, stranger,' said the elder Mr. Herriot. 'What brings you out of the mists? It's years, years, since you favoured the old man with a visit. Pardon if I don't arise. But you sit—you may sit in my presence.'

Martin sat, and leaning forward in his chair, laid the suggestion before his father. Ten bob a week for three years or so, but only if he got a scholarship, and he'd work his guts out to get one. And he'd pay it all back, every bit of it, as soon as he was earning money.

Mr. Herriot had lowered his pipe and his jaw. He was gaping. The suggestion had greatly shocked him. He was pained by it; so pained that he said 'To hell!' And again: 'To hell!' And then: 'No! Good Jesus, no! I never heard the like. You're rising nineteen, aren't you? I never heard of a father as had to keep his children at nineteen. More often the children should be keeping him, poor old man. And you seem to be asking me to keep you till you're about twenty-bloody-one. No, no; by all that's holy, no! It's only the

bloomin' aristocrats who can do that. I been payin' for brats all my life, it seems to me, and I want a bit o' rest from it now. I reckon I done my duty payin' for you for fourteen ruddy years. You can't say I haven't done that. And it's not fair to ask me to do no more. It's just not fair.'

'All right, Dad. I understand.'

'I don't know what you think I'm made of, I don't straight. I've no money to fling around. Takes about all I got to live here in any comfort, and I reckon I'm entitled to a bit of comfort now. In me old age. No, it's not playing the game.'

Mr. Herriot was certainly hurt. He creaked forward from his chair, and bending over the fender, knocked the ashes from his pipe whose fire, like his own, had been temporarily extinguished by this most damping suggestion of Martin's. Pay out good money for three years, and only get it back, if at all, in some dim future. No; ridiculous; impossible. Apart from his doubt whether money lent to many people—and especially to relatives—was ever paid back, there was another point which made a very strong appeal to him. He was over sixty now, and he might have left this sphere of monetary exchanges before the debt could be repaid. And he had no use for advancing a sum of money unless he was absolutely sure he'd be on the earth to receive it. That his heirs and assigns might receive it was not an idea that gave him any pleasure.

'Why, gaw-lummy, I might be dead before you could do anything about it!' he submitted, re-charging the pipe. 'No, I done my part and, so far as I'm concerned, you'll have to make do with your dole. Lots of other lads are.'

'True enough, Father. True enough.'

'The trouble is, you got too high an idea about yourself. One can hear it in the way you talk. Where ever did you get that damned swanky way of speaking? You didn't get it from your Auntie Vera, I'll lay! La-di-da-di-da, and True enough, Father. Gaw, who ever heard anything like it? It's that Berl, I suppose; him and all the books he makes you read. Your auntie says you're for ever reading, reading, reading, instead of doing a hand's turn of work somewhere. Why you want to go about with a little Yid like that I don't know.'

'The answer is simple, Father. I go about with him because he's worth all the rest of you put together.'

"The answer is simple, Father"—gaw-blimey! Anyone'd think you'd been to Oxford and all. Sounds more like one of

our gentlemen in the board room than anyone down in my cellars. My opinion is that if you'd talk a little more like a good East-ender, you'd have more chance of getting a job. People don't like La-di-da. I don't meself.'

Martin rose from his chair and picked up his cap from the table. 'Well, I'll be going. It seems there's no point in staying. Goodbye, Dad.'

So despairing were his attitude and words that Mr. Herriot was touched for a moment by an uncomfortable pity. 'There, I'm sorry I can do nothing for you, son,' he began, 'but I simply ain't got the money. That's the truth. I've only just about enough for meself, and I ain't as young as I was. Time's coming when I shall need all I got.'

'Don't worry, Father. I won't trouble you again. I'd have paid it back, but . . . well, I'll never ask you for anything again.' The tears stood in his eyes and he turned them quickly from view. 'I'll make my own way as well as I can. So long. So long.' And he went from the room and the house without another word to anyone.

Obstinately, defiantly, not at all clear what his purpose might be, he went to the Evening Classes at the Art School, and in due time sat for a scholarship. He was given four tests, Memory, Modelling, Design, and Antique. His failure in all was complete. Among the examiners it was derisory. His drawings, I have since learned, were stiff, laboured and imitative, with no trace in them of natural ease or originality.

The day he learned of his failure, he walked far away from the Art School and the streets he knew. He walked mile upon mile along the East India Dock Road, and the East India Dock Wall Road, to its very end where it greeted the river at the little embankment opposite Blackwall station. Both embankment and station have long since disappeared but in those days they formed a riverside terminus of the old London and North Eastern Railway. This was the place to come if you wanted to watch the big ships sailing down Bugsby Reach to the sea.

And now Martin leant on the embankment wall and looked out at the river. He felt strangely carefree and indifferent in the sun-warmed, salty air. He gazed out at the wide loneliness of the river. On his right was Blackwall Reach and on his left Bugsby Reach, and the water of both, barely moving on this calm day, was of a slaty black shot with gold. The gold came from the afternoon glamour over the Bugsby and Greenwich

Marsches. On the farther bank, behind Blackwall Point, rose tall chimneys, gas-holders, coal hoists, and cranes. The cranes were still, but smoke idled away from the chimneys towards the west. Apparently there was work there, under the chimneys. A slow breeze from the East brought a smell of sea water and coal and wet green weeds. The whole river, the whole world, was extraordinarily silent; he could hear only the repetitive stumble of the ripples on the muddy sand, and now and then a siren from a far-off ship; and when at last a big ship flying the Swedish flag came out of Millwall Dock and down the Blackwall Reach, it came towards him without a sound. Not a sound as it passed down Bugsby Reach; and even the waves from its wash came on to the mud with slippers feet.

He stayed there till it was dark, and the tide was down, and the wind moaning in Bugsby Reach. Then, because it was cold now, he came away with his shoulders hunched high, his hands thrust deep in his pockets, and his eyes on the hopeless places before him.

§

Martin became nineteen. He entered upon his twentieth year, which he described to me afterwards, high upon Grisedale Pike, as the bitterest year of his life. For nearly two years now he had been out of work, and drifting—except for those few odd jobs with their humiliating payment. Now, approaching twenty, he refused to look for work any more. ‘I’m not going to beg for the right to work. I go on my knees to no one. I’m finished.’

But—nothing to do, ever, any more! Day following day, week following week, year following year, and nothing to do. No work; no play, because no money to spend. No girl, because never a decent suit again; no woman, no marriage, no home. Nothing ever.

Why not die?

He often wandered about now, hands in pockets, considering death as a friend.

Mrs. Mickiewicz sighed for him. ‘The poor boy. He was not a bad boy, but he is going down the hill fast. Like others I seen, he’s becoming *queer*.’ Always, even as a child, he was inclined to go into himself, and shut himself in, but now he wandered about, for days on end, a moody, secret brooder. The inner deterioration revealed itself in his appearance. He was now a gaunt

youth with slackly rounded shoulders, darkly hollowed cheeks, dulled, sad eyes, and sultry mouth. At one time he walked around with his jacket collar turned up around his muffler and his wide shoulders lifted against the cold, because he had nothing under the jacket but a vest. In a defiant fury, after passing Uncle Jim's Dining Rooms and a savoury smell from the basement, he had sold waistcoat, shirt, and overcoat at a ragshop and come back with the price of a meal. Sometimes now, because his clothes were old and uncleaned and smelt, he saw women sidle away from him with offended nostrils. Then, defiantly, he stepped closer to them that they might inhale more of the same medicine.

As he mooched about the pavements, no longer caring who saw him, he played mostly with one pleasant dream: he saw himself leaving home (if No. 18 Omar Square was worth that name) and wandering away—on and on to anywhere. He had learned from other lads that you could live by tramping from casual ward to casual ward and coming away with a sixpenny meal ticket in your pocket. Go from home—wander away—teach Auntie Vera, teach your father, teach the world, that you were done with them all.

A dream, if it is kept gestating in the womb of the mind will often, quite unexpectedly, come forth and be born as a fact. Then the Word, in a sudden moment, is made flesh. It was an evening in July, a sunny, warm, inviting evening, and he came slopping from the pavements into the kitchen. And there he saw at once that Auntie Vera was in a temper: she was muttering curses and complaints as she hung washed garments on the clothes-horses or reached up to fling them over the clothes-lines festooned beneath the ceiling. But for Auntie Vera to be a-simmer with ill-temper was nothing unusual, and he slopped on to a chair, sighing wearily, and quite unaware that his hour was come.

'Get off that chair,' snapped Auntie Vera. 'I want it. I want it to stand on. *I'm* working, if no 'one else is. *Someone's* got to work.'

'Hell!' cried Martin. 'Do you suppose it's my fault I'm not working?'

'Well, what are we going to do? Are you never going to get any work?'

'No. Obviously not.'

'Well, but—don't just say it like that! What'll we do?'

'Don't ask me. I don't know.'

' *Tchah!* Lord, you just don't try. That's what I say: you don't try.'

' No, I don't. That's right, lady. And I'm not going to.'

' Then I say you ought to be ashamed of yourself. Jest giving in. Jest sitting about reading. Have you no guts at all? I always said you'd never do anything with your life. And jest look at you! What do you look like? Who'll give you a job, looking like that?'

' Oh, shut up! Nark it! I don't care what I look like.'

' Look at me. Did I give in? Didn't I set to and *make* work for myself? Didn't I go out and scrub floors? And earn here and earn there? When did you last get even an odd job? Months and months ago.'

' True enough, dearest Auntie.' But it wasn't true: he'd had odd jobs which he'd never reported to Auntie Vera, lest she'd expect him to hand over some of the shillings he'd earned.

' Well, I jest can't go on like this. For ten years now I've kep' you and lost money at it all the time.'

' Oh, nark it! Give it a rest. It's daft to come that stuff with me. I'm not such a simp as to swallow that. You'd never have taken me in if you hadn't seen some advantage in it. I can't see you doing anything for nothing, Auntie dear. I reckon you've done well enough out of me. There was always enough for the gin and beer.'

' And do you suppose, if I've had enough for a little refreshment now and then, when I've been wore out, it's come from what you've give me? Good law, haven't I let rooms——'

' Yes: kept a disorderly house.'

' Wotter you mean? Wotter you saying?'

' Oh, stow it, Auntie! Do you suppose my eyes aren't open? That woman down in the basement, do you suppose I don't know what lark she's up to? And the old bag before her, haven't I seen her plenty of times come in with some fat old steamer in tow? And didn't you know all about it? And before that, didn't you let the room, sometimes, by the night?'

' What people do is no business of mine.'

' I wonder if the cops'd agree to that. You beat me once for going to look at the tarts in Dyers Street, so pure you were, but, my gosh, I call this the Dyers Street Annexe.'

' You call it to *who*? ' Alarm glared from her eyes.

' Oh, not to the cops. Don't worry. I don't do the cops work for them. I don't mind how you make money. I'd make

it any way myself, if I could. But I think you'd be sorry if you lost my fifteen bob from the dole.'

'Oh, that's what you think, is it? Well, lemme tell you, ever since you've had that front room, it's lawst me seven shillings a week, because I've had to go upstairs.' (For very shame, ever since he was fifteen, she'd let him get off that bath-board and have the front room.) 'Just try and see who'll have you at fifteen shillings. Go and live with your dad and see what he'll say. Go and see if your sister'd have you.'

'I'd rather be dead than live with them. And, come to that, I think I'd rather be dead than go on living with you.' And, his temper flaring, he swept from kitchen to backyard, hearing Auntie Vera's last words, 'And that's gratitude! *That's* all the thanks you get!'

He went out into that backyard where once before, as a child, he had mooned about, refusing to return into his auntie's home.

And suddenly he knew that he was in the presence of Decision. He stood still, his underlip protruding, his teeth touching his upper lip, his fingers picking at his nails. He was seeing the roads—the long country roads—roads that ever changed—because he would not be allowed more than once a month into the same casual ward. So the lads had told him. He was seeing a spike—as the lads called a casual ward. A night in a spike was little different from a night in prison. Your clothes taken from you; made to bathe; given a pauper's grey shirt for a nightgown; pushed with some other bloke into a cell that was exactly like a prison cell; given for supper a hunk of bread and marge and a billy-can of cocoa; locked in till eight in the morning—then 'Slops Outside!'—just as in prison; then made to work for Bed and Bath and Breakfast—chopping wood, bashing spuds for the workhouse dinner; then given the once-over by a doctor and so good-day;—pushed out with a meal ticket into the morning.

A dog's life—a lost dog's life—but better to be a straying vagrant than be treated by Auntie Vera as a poor relation. Good to see how she'd like losing his weekly money. Good to teach her and Dad and Society generally that he took no hard words from them—that he was done with the lot of them—that they'd lost him for ever.

He turned back into the kitchen. In the kitchen Auntie Vera, as angry as he, was pretending not to look at him, but he

knew that she'd see everything from the side of her eye, so he staged his demonstration.

He drew from the chimney-side cupboard a large piece of brown paper; he went with it, gently singing, into the front room; from the chest there he drew his one remaining worn-out shirt and two pairs of old threadbare socks, one unwashed and unmended; he strolled back into the kitchen, humming, and took string from a tin; luckily he saw among the dirty clothes a vest which Auntie Vera had purposed to wash one day, and he snatched it, and snatched also a scarf from the festooned line above him. Yes, she might be saying not a word but she must guess why he was gathering his clothes and packing them.

With the clothes he placed his sketch book, paints and crayons, and two of his paintings that he thought good. Also two large books from the Library that he'd been wearily reading for weeks, and need hardly return now, since the Library would never know where to find him. The books were *The Survival of Civilisation* by an American university president, and John Richard Green's *History of the English People*.

He tied up his bundle, and went out into the passage, singing softly. He did not look back, but he knew that Auntie Vera's eyes were peeping round the kitchen door. Indeed she spoke.
‘What on earth . . . Martin, what——’

‘Good-bye,’ he interrupted gaily. ‘Every blessing. Give my love to Dad when you see him, and spit in his face for me.’

‘Oh, you wicked boy ! What on earth’s going to come of you ? Don’t be ridiculous. Come back and——’

But one gay leap down Auntie Vera’s steps, and she could consider his indebtedness to her in her kitchen, alone. He walked out of Omar Square for ever.

§

It was many months later that Martin Herriot returned to East London, and then it was only for an hour to glance at the streets and places he had known. He must have looked a queer young figure as he came along the road from the east, for he now wore the full, soft, fluffy beard of a young man, and his dark hair, uncut for months, overhung his coat collar. His pale young face with the melancholy black eyes, brilliant but wan, must have seemed odd indeed between the black beard and the

abundant boyish hair. I take it he looked like a young anchoret or fakir. Or perhaps like a sour young Christ.

Many turned to glance at him as he went by, but he was indifferent alike to their grins, their frowns, or their looks of pity, because his mood for months had been one of savage disdain for all men. He wanted dealings with none, and cared for the opinion of none. It was only as he approached the corner of Omar Square that his steps became furtive; here he would evade if possible the eyes of any childhood friend because his clothes were ragged and his boots broken.

In the past months he had tramped the country from spike to spike, not too unhappily, for it was pleasant to a young man, of solitary bent, to walk on and on between the hedgerows, or to lie on the grass verge of the road and watch the people go by, or to sit in a meadow with other vagrants, not mixing much with them, but listening to their talk, till the clock struck six and the spike gates opened.

Sometimes he lay beneath the hedge, reading a long book on Social History or Art Criticism, bought from a twopenny box.

He had discovered a way of making a little money on the road. He would sit on the grass, or on a gate, and paint on a postcard the house opposite him, probably under a red sunset; then take it to the kitchen door; and few were the housewives who would not give him a sixpence for it. But I suspect that they paid it rather for the beauty of the young face with the secret and sorrowful eyes than for the beauty of his picture.

From other tramps he had learned all the various ways of gleaning pence along the roads. His eye never missed a cigarette end or cigar stump tossed into gutter or roadway; he picked it up, put it in a tin, and when he had accumulated an ounce of tobacco, sold it for threepence. He got occasional jobs at kitchen doors—and here again I suspect his face was his fortune: he earned sixpence and a cup of tea for cleaning a bicycle, cutting a hedge, or sweeping a garden.

Sometimes, on summer nights, he had 'skipped'—that is, in the language of the road, he had slept under a haystack or a hedge; at other times when his long round from spike to spike had reached London again he would sleep in park or doorway during the daytime, and at night on an Embankment bench, his knees wrapped in newspapers. He had known what it was to spend the night in a 'Twopenny Hangover'; a shelter, that is, where for a twopenny fee you sat with other down-and-outs

on a long bench and draped yourself over a rope, with folded arms, for sleep.

And now he came along the Commercial Road to revisit the scenes of yesterday. He peeped into Omar Square and at Auntie Vera's house. He peeped into the clean little Tribe Street where his father dwelt in comfort with Genevieve. He walked past the hairdresser's saloon where he'd worked as a lather boy, and along the broad shop-front of John Dawson's. Last of all he came into Hagen Street, half hoping to meet old Berl and learn what had happened to him.

It had been an October day of midsummer warmth, and now, at five o'clock, all the children were in the street at play. Though the houses of Hagen Street were very small, yet the children were for the most part decently dressed and clean. They were much cleaner than the dirty and snotty children with whom he used to play in Omar Square: was this because they were nearly all the children of Jews? A dozen different games were on display in the long street: hop-scotch, rounders, cross-touch, marbles. Those children nearest him, as he turned the corner, were playing cross-touch, the girls screaming to the sky as they ran from the boy who was 'He'.

Now one girl, a child of about thirteen, having crossed between chaser and chased, ran screaming from capture in an exquisite delight of horror and alarm. She captured his eye and held it fast. Among all these dark-haired Jewish children she alone had hair of a glistening fairness, ranging from pale gold to a darkening brown. So pale was some of the gold that where it was tied to the rest by a bow at her nape, it hung in sharp contrast with the brown. She was slimmer than most of these ripe little Jewish girls, and she alone in the whole long street wore a school uniform: brown gym slip, brown stockings on her long flying legs, and brown shoes. The brown uniform heightened the browns and golds of her hair.

So radiant a figure was she as she ran from capture in a yelling, screeching, exquisite alarm, that Martin felt compelled to get closer to her. None of the children noticed him as he came slinking along by the house walls: they were too intent upon their games, and too well used to ragged figures in their streets. When he was close to the children playing touch, he stood watching them and longing for the child in brown to run his way. She came at last, and his seeking eyes saw that her skin was fair though tinted by the sun, her eyes blue and wide-set, her nose

soft and regular, and her mouth large, with full lips apart as she yelled and panted and smiled.

This beautiful face, beneath the hair of many golds, held him fastened to the pavement. Never, he thought, had he seen a lovelier girl-child. What adoration would be hers one day. Maddened adoration, surely, in this man and that, with jealousies, ecstasies, and tempests of despair. With her beauty-to-be she could command all things from the world. What more had those who'd been the mistresses of princes and kings? Could Helen have been lovelier than this at thirteen? Or Aspasia? Or the Du Barry? What a terrible possession, such beauty. And here she was—screaming at play in a London street, the boys who chased her not knowing or caring what was her beauty's promise, nor she knowing either. Her only interest, as she waited in the gutter, panting, was never to be caught.

He longed to say some word to her; more, to take her in his arms and press her against him; still more, to crush her, hurt her, and possess and enjoy her. A double emotion perturbed his breast: a-tenderness for anything so beautiful, and a longing to rap her away to some secret place and there cruelly have his way with her.

It may be that Herriot, telling me this story years afterwards exaggerated her beauty at this time, but you must understand that, ever since he was seventeen and workless, he had cut himself off, in his pride, from women. And, as a tramp, he had been, willy nilly, cut off from them. There were very few women in the tramping brotherhood, and certainly no young and desirable ones; this because there was far less unemployment among women and, anyhow, most young girls could attach themselves to a man, with or without the Church's blessing or the smile of old Law. And so it was that this ragged figure, gazing at a girl child, had had no knowledge of a woman since at fourteen, after talk with other boys hotly curious, he had visited a middle-aged prostitute in Dyers Street who for a half-crown had put his curiosity at rest, or since those early days when he had gone along to a railway arch or a tenement entry with a jane who would go there with a lad for a shilling.

Yes, he'd had some money in those days, but even then, thought he, gazing at the child, he could have had no hope of beauty like this, even if he'd sought only her companionship.

How could he have invited that brown uniform into his dirty home?

Ah, well, there it was—and he shrugged helpless shoulders and pretended that he accepted the position, but in fact he was filled with a great sadness. He walked on and away from the child and did not turn to look again at her because she hurt him so. He had thought of knocking at Berl's door, but now, somehow, felt ashamed to do so. He went to the far end of Hagen Street and there did turn round, just once, to see her again. And, having seen her, he now could not bring himself to turn the corner and go away. A suspicious, peering loiterer he seemed, and women watched him from doorsteps and called their husbands to look at him.

§

As he waited there, damning these ‘nosey’ women, he saw Berl come out of his house and walk towards the opposite end of the road. Immediately he ran after him and, coming close, saw that Berl must be in work and money because his little figure was once again in a suit of showy colour and cut, and this suit was clean and new. Its colour was some kind of pale bluish mauve—‘black currants and cream’ Martin called it; its jacket, neatly waisted, had back-turned cuffs and elegant flap-pockets; its trousers were extraordinarily wide and full—so full and ablow that they looked empty.

‘Berl! Hallo, Berl!’

Berl swung round. For a second he did not recognise Martin’s face in its bush of feathery black beard. Then he exclaimed, ‘Martin! My God, old Martin! Where have you been?’

‘Been? I’ve been on the bum. I was damned if I’d go on begging for work any more. And I’m not going to, either. Behold a distinguished rebel.’

‘But——’ Berl glance at, but tactfully flung his eyes away from Martin’s ruined garments—‘you can’t go on for ever like that. What happens when it’s winter?’

‘The spikes are still there in winter.’ And he described to Berl with some merriment his days on the road; then told him how he’d come back to the ‘Smoke’ (that is, London) partly because he hoped to see Berl.

‘Well, look,’ said Berl, ‘come back and see Father and

Mother. Mum always rather loved you. She'd be tickled to death to see you. You used to be one of her blue-eyed cherubs—or, I suppose, black-eyed'd be more to the point. The old man liked you too. Come and see them.'

'No . . . no, please not.' That clean little parlour was no place for his rags. 'Some other day, perhaps.'

'Well, come and let's eat together. I was going out to get a meal.' Obviously Berl, the merciful, was wondering if he was hungry and how to offer him a meal. 'I'd like you to have one with me. It's ages since—'

'I can't afford much, old Berl. I've got about ten clods in my pocket, and that's all. You may be bung full of money—you look it—but I'm on the ribs.'

'All the more reason why you should come and have a meal as my guest. I'm not too badly off at the moment.'

'I don't mind going to a cheap place. What about Uncle Jim's Dining Rooms, Civility and Quick Service?'

'Good enough for me.'

As they went along Berl told him all about his present work. For some time he had been picking up money as a temporary or 'extra' waiter. Sometimes it was work for one day only, at a banquet, a wedding reception, or a ball supper; sometimes he relieved a permanent waiter, who was sick or on holiday, for several days together. The pay was sometimes six shillings a day, plus tips; sometimes only half-a-crown a night, plus tips. It was unlikely he could ever get a permanent job because he'd never been properly trained; he'd only got going on these relief jobs thanks to a waiter who was a Jew and lived five doors from him in Hagen Street. His best job had been in an expensive restaurant up West. He'd held that job for nearly three weeks, drawing a quid a week as wages and as much as three or four pounds from the 'tronc', which was the box into which all the waiters put all their tips, ready for the share-out at the end of the week. But the Head Waiter had lost his temper with him one night, just before a banquet, and called him a 'dirty little Jew', whereupon Berl had laid down his tray of silver and glass and walked out into the night, leaving the company to eat unattended by him.

Tonight he had no job—October was always slack—but tomorrow at nine o'clock he started again at a Kosher restaurant in the Whitechapel Road.

As Berl spoke, Martin could not help wondering how he, so

very small and so very ugly, had got these waiter's jobs. He decided that it was Berl's good voice and address, born of much study at home and much debate among intellectual friends, and his really perfect manners, born of his goodwill and considerateness towards all, that had won them for him.

Their talk brought them to Uncle Jim's, and they pushed open his squeaking door and went in. Uncle Jim's long rectangular room was divided into compartments or cubicles, like high-backed church pews or horses' loose boxes, with an alley-way between them. Each compartment contained a long narrow table and benches against its walls. A mirror ran all round the room above the dado and in the frame of the mirror were stuck picture postcards, now brown and curling, of massive and sinewy prizefighters, all inflating their chests and swelling their muscles into various promising attitudes. The heat from the kitchen at the rear poured into the room and found difficulty in escaping, since the only outlet was the fanlight over the door. With the heat and the smell came the clattering of crockery and the chattering of women's voices.

The loose boxes were fairly full and Berl and Martin had to walk to the back to find a place of rest. As they walked up the alley-way, they chanced to pass an old schoolfellow, Dick Withies, who recognised Berl at once and called out, 'Hallo, Old Ugly' and 'Crimes, but it's Holy Mike! It's old Mucky Wits!' Martin he did not recognize, under his black beard, but he did snigger at his appearance. Martin heard that snigger and turned and looked at him. The man grinned uncomfortably and then frowned, as if wondering where he'd seen that face before.

Berl and Martin sidled into the empty compartment at the back and sat facing each other. Civility and Quick Service there might be at Uncle Jim's, but Cleanliness there was not. A sweating girl from the kitchen in a stained apron brought them a bill-of-fare well mapped with dirty thumb-marks. Berl ordered the usual 'cut from the joint and two veg', and two mugs of tea, and while they waited for the meal, Martin asked the question he'd been wanting to ask all along but had postponed, thinking it politer to ask about Berl's interests first. He asked it with a feigned unconcern.

'I say, Berl, who was the kid in the school uniform playing with the other kids near your house? A girl with hair all golden and brown and in a brown gym slip. She was beautiful, I thought. And very much the lady.'

'Oh, that? That must have been Lindy.'

'Lindy?'

'Yes. I always call her that because the cheeky little beast always calls me Mickey. Her surname's Lindgren. She's Helga Lindgren, really.'

'Helga?'

'Yes, the Lindgrens are of Swedish extraction. Pa Lindgren's old man came from Sweden. Mr. Lindgren is one of the few Goids in our Street. He's a compositor at the Marcus Printing Works in Bromley—been there for years and years and must get a fair screw now but they go on living in a tiny house no bigger than ours because they've great ambitions for Lindy. They sacrifice everything for her, their only kid—'

'I don't wonder. I should love her if she were mine.'

'Yes, they're bound up in her. Of course. She was at our old school and bright enough but not so as to get a scholarship, and now she goes to some Convent Secondary School where they pay quite a packet for her. In a year or two they're going to send her to College.'

'College! What: Oxford or Cambridge—sort of thing?'

'Oh, Lord, no. Some business training college, so that she can be some big man's secretary. They're determined she's not going to be a factory or workshop girl.'

'She won't be anybody's secretary long,' suggested Martin.
'She'll be someone's wife.'

'No doubt.'

'She's very beautiful, isn't she?'

'She will be, one day,' Berl amended.

'She's the most beautiful thing I've ever seen.'

Berl showed no surprise at this fervent utterance, regarding it as a pleasant piece of hyperbole. 'Well, yes, she's very pretty, I suppose. She's quite a sweet kid too.'

'For how long, I wonder.' The sweating girl had brought a plate of bread, and Martin, having broken off a morsel, was fingering it into a plastic ball, contemplatively.

'Why do you say, For how long?'

'Because she doesn't know as yet that she's exceptionally beautiful. When she does it will be poison to her sweetness. She'll cease to be interested in anything on God's earth, but her appearance. She'll have no interest in Literature or Art or History or Politics. Why should she think about these things

when she has her beauty to think about? Her expression will be an insincere mask because her thoughts will be turned inward all the time, and her talk, if she manages to listen to anyone else will be the dullest and emptiest thing imaginable. Probably she'll hardly talk at all but just sit with folded hands and think about her beauty.'

'Oh, I don't know,' objected Berl, laughing. 'The Lindgrens are good people and they've laboured to bring Lindy up well. It's been the one great interest of their lives. They're simple and unsophisticated and go regularly to St. Mary's Church, and Lindy goes to her Sunday School, and all that.'

'And a fat lot of good that'll do. When was Sunday School religion ever strong enough to compete against beauty?'

'I should think quite often,' declared Berl, simply.

'No, no, Berly! Not with such beauty as is coming to her. There ought always to be a flaw somewhere in faces like hers, so as to give their owners a little humility. In a year from now your Lindy'll be sunk in self-centredness. She'll care for nothing but material things, with the result that some wealthy brute'll buy her up one day, some gilded profiteer who doesn't give a damn for the things of the mind but only for the things of the body.'

Martin, his hungers astir, would have liked to continue speaking of Helga Lindgren as a man's bedfellow, but Berl, his emotions unengaged, began, 'Look here, Martin: I've a bright idea. You can't go on tramping the country in winter time. I won't have it! Look: we've got a basement room which we—'

'Poor kid, I wonder what is really in store for her. Probably she'll be happy as long as she has her beauty to treasure and caress, but in time it'll wilt away, and then she'll be left with nothing—no interests of any kind, and probably not even her profiteer. She'll be adrift with nothing at all. It's all very sad, but excessive beauty's almost bound to starve the intelligence, and I see little hope for your Lindy—'

'I don't think I agree with you at all. I think Lindy is quite as likely to inspire in someone a passionate love that will protect and care for her for ever. Oh, yes, I can quite imagine that! I'd quite like to be, myself, the man who'd have her to care for and to keep. What a pessimist you have become. Where do you get these strange ideas from?'

'One has plenty of time to think about Life, walking along

the roads. What was that you were saying about my tramping the roads in winter time?"

'I was saying we've got a basement room we never use. It's rather dark and dreary because the window, as you must have seen, is only a foot or so above the pavement, but the old kitchen range is still there, and a gas bracket. Ah, here's the grub. Thank you, miss. Thank you. It's habitable enough. I've slept there myself when we've had an auntie or someone staying with us. There's an old sofa in it, and some odds and ends of furniture. Its the best I can offer you, I'm afraid, because Dad isn't doing so well, and we rely on what Mother brings in and the seven-and-six we get from the lodger in the only spare room; but I'm sure Mum and Dad'd let you have it like a shot. Mum was always so fond of you.'

'But, Berl——'

'Let me finish. My idea is that you could at least have it to sleep in and so save all your money for food, and possibly you could use it as a studio sometimes, paint your postcards there and then peddle them all over the place. My Gosh, I'm pretty sure the women'll buy pictures of their own home and street. They'll buy 'em like muffins on a cold Sunday. Pass the sauce bottle and the pepper, please. You're not offended at my suggesting this, are you? It's only a very dingy underground room.'

'Offended! Great Heavens, no! I think it's extraordinarily decent of you. And perhaps, if I did make a little money I could pay your mother something.'

'Suggest that again, my dear fellow, and the offer is withdrawn. Let's eat up quickly and go and see it.'

§

Martin accepted the offer of that underground chamber in Hagen Street, and no one in the world knew that his chief reason for doing so was that he could be near a beautiful child and see her sometimes from his window.

A dark and dingy little chamber it was, as Berl had said, and so low-ceiled that if Martin had been tall he must have touched the ceiling with his head. Once it had been floored with stone flags, but the stone was porous and the damp from the London clay beneath had come seeping through it. To

counter this some previous tenant had covered the old flags with floor-boards, but these were now rotting and splintered. The old wall-paper was smoke-begrimed because it was the one that had been there, years ago, when the rusty range was in use. The window, of course, had been smoke-begrimed too, but this Berl and Martin had washed clean. Even so it let in but little light on winter days, because the larger part of it was below ground and the grating in the pavement was barely two feet wide.

A dark and dingy little vault; but the old saddle-bag sofa was there, and Berl saw to it that there was a table too, and a chair. And here Martin drew and painted his postcards, usually by a gas flame, because there was little but twilight in the room. Berl was right in suggesting that he would pick up money for his painted postcards even more easily in London than in the country, but at first Martin found it far more difficult to draw a street of houses than a single cottage or mansion among its trees. Untaught, he could not get the perspective right. At last he overcame this failure by a trick—a trick that he kept secret even from Berl. He bought a cheap camera from a junk stall; photographed the house or street or pub, and then slavishly copied the lines in the print. To the end Herriot's paintings were stiffly accurate, technically skilled, but wholly unspontaneous and uninspired; stiff, static, and dead.

But they earned pence and shillings enough to buy food and shoes and a little fuel. Hardly a woman at her door but was ready to give sixpence for a hand-painted postcard of her home; hardly a landlord but would take a few pictures of his house to sell to his customers, or would allow the artist to come into his bars and peddle them for himself.

When he was not drawing or peddling, he would lie on the old mahogany-and-saddlebag sofa and read his learned volumes on History and Art, Natural Science and Sociology. Sometimes, as he read of great men, he dropped the book in dejection, and then he did not read at all, but just lay there in the half-darkness, thinking and wondering, often with his face to the wall. But always he was drawn from sofa or chair by the voices of children in the street. Then, quickly, he would drag the chair to the window, mount on it, and look through that part of the window which was above the pavement. Right and left he would peer among the children to see if the girl with the brown and gold hair was with them at play. If she was there, running and

screaming and dancing with excitement, he would remain on that chair for an hour or more, his eyes, just above the level of the pavement, following her every movement.

One evening, before autumn was out, he watched her playing 'Conkers' with a chestnut on a string. When it was not her turn to compete she stood in the road, swinging her chestnut round and round so as to make it whistle, or swaying it gently back and forth like a censer.

Her house was down the street on the opposite side, and he did not learn which it was till an October afternoon—one of those warm afternoons like a laggard from summer—when he saw her walk to the open door, having wearied of play, and sit upon her white threshold in that graceful, statuesque position which a child will sometimes assume, her back against the door-post, one leg stretched before her, and one knee drawn up so that her hands could clasp around it. On another evening he saw her sitting sideways on the kerb opposite her house, with her legs under her in the gutter and one hand resting on the pavement while she read a child's 'comic' which lay open on the kerb.

Usually she was one of the happiest and certainly one of the noisiest children in the road: dancing, skipping, jeering, and then shrieking to the grey heaven above London if another child suddenly chased her for 'catching' or for retribution. Often it seemed to him that she would have made a ballerina, such native and untutored grace was there in her movements as she ran or dodged or skipped on the kerbstone, jeeringly tempting someone to try to catch her. Her bodily movements in these days were certainly more beautiful than her oral effects, for her yellings and screechings, when she was in a state of delighted terror, belonged to that horrid and anti-social fraternity of noises which includes the factory siren, the klaxon horn, the engine's whistle, and the imperious bawling whine of an American police car.

Yes, at thirteen, Helga Lindgren was a vessel brim-charged and over-spilling with the joy of life.

But once he was watching her from above his grating, as a prisoner in a dungeon might, and of a sudden this usual bright picture changed. It darkened. A boy, Andrew Wiertz, had been over-rough as he caught her, and she had pushed him angrily away, whereupon he had pummelled her with a closed fist and administered a stinging, ringing slap upon her cheek. A

slap that stopped all other diversions in the street. A slap that drew all the other children around her to watch her tears and her wrath. She was now awash with tears, and yelling her fury at the boy, who had retreated to a safe situation on the opposite pavement. In this prepared position, out of charging range, and with wide possibilities of rapid retreat to a third line of defence, he stood grinning and cocking snooks and bombarding her with jeers. Helga replied with stampings of her foot. Then, as he strolled away, she put her face into her hands and sobbed into them. In a passion of pity Martin longed to run out to her and put his arm about her shoulders and draw her against him and lead her away—how wonderful it would be to hold her little body against his—but he remembered his ragged clothes and was ashamed of them. And while he stood there wondering if he would risk her recoil from him and the insupportable stab this would be, he saw Berl emerge from the house and approach the weeping child. Someone called his name, and instantly Helga lifted her head and ran to him as to someone she loved and who loved her. And Berl it was who drew her against him and then, taking her hand, led her, sobbing, to his home that he might comfort her with sweets or cake.

Towards this very house they came, Berl and she. They passed his pavement window, she unaware of the eyes that looked up at her from the level of her feet. Her face was swollen with crying, all its beauty marred, and he was glad to learn that he could love her for herself alone, with her beauty withdrawn; nay, never as now had he so longed to hug her close and smooth her brow, and this in pure pity, not in desire. They entered the house; he heard her feet in the room above his head, for Berl had taken his unhappy little companion into the parlour like a guest of honour; he heard them moving about there and at length laughing there—but still he stayed in his vault below, ashamed to go up to her in his rags.

§

There was another occasion when, apparently, she considered that one child, or perhaps all the children, had been less than nice to her and she went in a fine disdain to her doorstep where she sat in the last of the sun, her head against the doorpost and

her hands clasped around one knee. And there she remained, her attitude haughtily informing the world—or at least the street—that she preferred her own company to that of cruder children.

Sometimes, by craning his neck and peering sideways, he would see her playing far away at the other end of the street and then he would feel driven, irresistibly forced, to climb up from his basement and issue from the house so as to get nearer to her and see her better—and no one in the world, thank God, knew that as he walked towards her he was saying in a kind of mute, blind, useless appeal, ‘Helga . . . Helga . . . Helga . . .’ Always if he did this stealthy thing he would walk close to the house walls with head half averted because he did not want her to notice him: he was ashamed of his frayed and dirty clothes, and—though for some sour and hostile reason he would not part with it—half-ashamed of his fluffy black youthful beard.

But one day, a cold November tea-time, she did see him slinking along the walls; and she did stop her play to stare; and she did draw the eyes of all her playmates to him; and she did lead them in their giggles, with a hand over her mouth. Nay more, she turned away from him to hide her amusement, lifting her brown shoulders high, and pressing her thumb against her teeth, as she controlled the laughter; then turned and looked at him again and turned away to laugh again.

Now, strange it may seem, ladies, but this contemptuous laughter of a girl-child was a crucial—almost *the* crucial—event in the life of Martin Herriot. A wound, leaving a man blind, could hardly do more to a life. No doubt his mind had been slipping deeper into a queer sickly state, till it was never so raw and easily hurt; perhaps the months of poor feeding had softened and weakened it; certainly there had been days when hunger had raised a strange white wildness in his head; but whatever the causes or the excuses, the fact remains, that he turned and hurried back to his underground place and there, having shut the door on himself, burst into a fit of blind weeping. He flung himself to the rim of his chair, let his arms fall between his knees and his head droop over them, while the paroxysm racked him.

Darkness gathered in the room till it was like night, though only dusk outside. The paroxysm exhausted itself, and he sat there, with his breath just stumbling over the last of the sobs.

He sat there thinking for a long hour, while it got darker and darker. Darker the world about him, but brighter and broader grew a gleam of savagery on the edges of his thought. His mind, in this long session underground, was an incubating chamber for a new, gripping, fascinating and splendidly healing thought. The seed of the thought was this: ‘She would not have laughed at me if I’d been well-dressed and wealthy.’ This seed blossomed into the conviction : ‘ All that matters in the world is success, no matter how ruthlessly achieved.’ And this flowered into the certainty that, in a world which worshipped success, if you were a sinner on a large enough scale and splendidly successful thereby, you’d only be called great and applauded, whereas, if you were only a little sinner, you’d get only the kicks and contempt of the world. At present he was one whom the world despised, a figure of fun to children, because, in simple fact, he was not a sinner big enough. The world, after casting him out as a waste-product, would hold him down by its hundred little laws against the petty sinner, unless he magnified himself with money into a Gulliver, able to snap himself free and rise a giant among the Lilliputians, despising them in his turn.

Sitting in that room beneath a London street, he saw the world all round him as something to be despised, defied, and defeated. And manifestly there was only one weapon with which to defeat it: money. And only one way to forge that weapon: a single-minded resolve that forwent everything except the battle for money and power. Yes, let him plumb the lowest depths, if necessary; let him care not a hoot whom his machinations hurt or ruined. In that hour down there his Socialism, never more than a mere decorative gaud, fell off him, and he assumed the opposite garment, an individualism that sought nobody’s good but his own. Yes, and as he donned it he felt full of light and joy. This was Conversion. It was an ecstasy in discovery ; it was integration, healing, happiness, joy. Evidently the experience was much the same whether, broken by disillusion you gave yourself wholly to goodness, which was God, or, corroded by bitterness, you gave yourself wholly to selfishness, which was Evil.

§

Next morning he walked out of that Hagen Street basement. He told Berl that he didn't want to be beholden to anybody. This was true, but a far stronger reason was that he couldn't bear to be seen again by that child. Also the action seemed to sort well with his new resolve to defeat the world. It was the beginning. He did not leave London this time, because he had money enough to get a bed at night in a common lodging house or a Salvation Army hostel. Usually it was to one of the latter that he went, because they let you in early if you bought a two-penny or fourpenny meal, whereas the others did not open their doors till six or seven o'clock. In the hours when he was compelled to keep the streets, he tramped the long pavements with vast and towering aspirations shaping in his head. If all bars and barricades were down, were not all things attainable? Let him but get started, and . . . He would be patient, careful, calculating, and, if necessary, cruel, but he would have his way with the world. He would conquer it, and stand above it, and laugh at it, as at a poor defeated thing, just as that child had laughed at him. Let him but think how he could set about this conquest . . . let him but think. . . .

§

In those days there was a large Salvation Army hostel on the south side of the Mile End Road: it has long since become the warehouse and trading counter of a firm of Tool Manufacturers. Do the warehousemen and clean, black-coated clerks ever think of what happened between their walls, and on their floors, say forty years ago? Two hundred and fifty beds the hostel had then in its long dormitories; and in the wet winter time, after mid-day, its long Day Room was crowded with as many as two hundred men. On the day I am thinking of—at about six in the evening—more than a hundred men were there: men of every age and occupation (if any occupation) sitting on the hard chairs against the walls, or by the long tables which stretched out at right angles to the walls. Some were honest working men, including a few coloured seamen, but mostly they were men who had come adrift from the recognized and respected trade-routes of life: match-sellers, bootlace-sellers, street singers, buskers—all those shy traffickers along the gutters; and screevers, as the pavement artists were called, and moochers, who were those

who made no attempt to appease the law against begging, but just stretched out their hands and begged.

All were now resting from these activities; some reading old newspapers; many doing nothing at all, but just sitting on their hard chairs; a few fallen asleep. Of those asleep some lolled back against the brick wall; others lolled forward towards their knees.

All of them might grumble about the discipline in this hostel, and the religion ‘forced down their throats’ by the officers, but they would queue up to get into it and not only because it was open with its warmth at noon but also because, unlike the common lodging houses, its beds were four feet apart, their mattresses tolerably comfortable and you got clean sheets and good blankets, so that if you slept in shirt and pants you were fairly warm. And you could get a fair meal for fourpence: say a mug of tea and two sausages with a hunk of bread.

The long Day Room with its plum-coloured dado and egg-yellow bricks above, was as bare as a workhouse hall and as clean as a hospital ward; but it smelt—it smelt of its hot-water pipes and its hundred guests. The warmth of the room brought out the smell of these sad gentlemen: a smell compounded of stale foot-sweat, unhealthy breaths, and urine long dry on garments never changed.

The walls of this big hall had palpably but a poor opinion of these gentlemen who sat under them, for they bore at many places on their yellow brick, instructions to sinners in the form of biblical texts, and other *avis aux voyageurs* for those who were walking in dark ways. ‘Christ came into the world to save sinners,’ announced one placard; ‘He that followeth Me shall not walk in darkness,’ promised another; and ‘Gambling is a fool’s business; the bookmaker must win or go out of business,’ said a third. And here and there hung pictures of miracles—as if miracles would indeed be needed.

Placards and pictures seemed justified in their doubts this evening, for at the table nearest the Dining Room door sat an orderly with arm resting on its white-enamelled top and a pencil knocking on it, as he gambled with an old, grey, unshaven man who was manipulating a pack of filthy cards. This orderly was little different from some of the less presentable guests; until recently he had been one of them, but now he was getting his keep and eight shillings a week for cleaning, scrubbing, making beds, emptying pots, serving meals, and generally assisting the

foreman orderly. His was a short figure with legs slightly bowed and back slightly rounded; his age was not much more than forty, but he looked older, with his creased and weather-beaten face, and his little eyes, bright as boot buttons, shining shrewdly between lids half-closed.

‘Black,’ he called, while the old grey man shuffled the cards.
‘Aye, Black mun coom oop soon. Black, lad.’

The old man cut. ‘Red.’

‘Aw t’hell! Red it is. Ah’ll be bust this road. Broke to t’wide.’ With his pencil he added a penny to the old man’s score on the margin of an evening paper. ‘Court card or owt above seven. Coom on, lad. T’luk mun change soom time. Court card.’

The old man shuffled the pack and cut again. ‘Sorry, mate. Seven.’

‘Seven. Seven it is. Blimey, tha’ll be able to hev’ a banquet at boofay.’ He recorded another penny on the newspaper.
‘Shoofle agen, lad. Ah’ll try Red this time. T’hell wi’ Black. Rouge, ma boy; Rouge.’

The old man was in the act of cutting, when the Dining Room door opened, and a tall dark Salvation Army officer entered. The orderly turned his head to see who this unexpected visitor might be and, perceiving who it was, instantly murmured, ‘Jesus!’, snatched up his score sheet, and shot from the old card-shuffler towards a lad who was sitting against the wall, quite alone.

‘Art tha coomin’ to service, lad?’ he asked, loud enough for the officer, who was passing, to hear. ‘T’Major leads us in prayer and hymns at about half past six. Aye, at half past six. In t’Meeting Room. Only just oop stairs. You coom along and say a prayer or two. It’ll do yer good. Leastways, it woan’t do yer no harm.’

‘No,’ said the lad, very firmly; and added angrily, ‘Not on your life.’

‘Nay, brother, but it’s daft to talk like that.’ The officer was now speaking to the old man (whose cards were safely in his pocket) so, since he was still near at hand, the orderly continued, ‘You need all t’help you can get in this world, if you’re to beat t’devil in yer. Ye knew that, doan’t you? Hah long is it since tha kneeled dahn and said a prayer to tha Feyther in Heaven?’

‘Not since I was made to do it at school, bet your life.’

'What, aren't you a Christian?'

'A Christian? A *Christian!* Christ, no!'

'What? Nivver bin?'

'Thank God, no.'

'Wurn't yer pa and ma Christians?'

'Not that I ever noticed.'

'Good Lord! My pa and ma wur members o' t'Wesleyan Chapel and Sunday School, and Ah wur given religion from mornin' to neet.' He coughed quickly, as if thinking he hadn't phrased that too well. 'Ah wur in t'Young Man's Class at Mill Lane Sunday School, and a Sunday School teacher meseln, ah'ter a time. Aye. An' Ah bin a local preacher too. But you! Blimey, wheer wur ye fetcht oop?"

'Here in Stepney.'

'Yer sound too good fer Stepney. Yer educated, aren't yer? What's your name, lad?'

'Herriot.'

'That's yer surname, is it? D'ye have a Christian name, sein' as yer ain't a Christian?'

'Martin.'

'Martin. An' ye're a proper atheist, are yer, Martin?'

'Of course I am. Like hell I am. Or an agnostic. Whether there's a God I neither know nor care, but if there is, you can present my compliments to Him and say I have neither worship for Him, nor reverence. I know I'm bad myself, but I know also that I'm a little better than Him.'

'*Tsh! Tsh!*' advised the orderly, casting a quick, anxious glance at the officer. 'An atheist? Aye . . . weel. . . .' He looked down at the seated lad and nodded knowingly several times, while a grin lurked in his little boot-button eyes and in the creases around them.

It was the first time he'd seen this lad in the hostel, and he'd been studying him with interest while he gambled. The lad was a noticeable figure, sitting there silently among all these much older men: a youth of about twenty with a black fluffy beard, heavy black overhanging hair, and melancholy dark eyes. A good-looking lad he would have been had not a sourness in his face destroyed its pleasing quality and marred the appeal of its youth and sadness. Very sad and solitary he seemed, and plainly in a poor way, with that naked knee showing through a tear in his trousers.

'An atheist . . . weel, theer now!' A glance towards the

officer showed that he had passed out of earshot. ‘ So’m I, reely, choom. And so’s ivvery man what’s got a headpiece on him, Ah reckon. But there y’are! Doan’t be so soft as ter let ’em see it here. That woan’t do yer no good. You mun please ’em all you can. Yon, by the way, was t’ Commanding Officer. That’s what they call him. Daft, isn’t it. He wouldn’t be a lance corporal in t’proper army. Ah know: Ah bin in army. And here he’s “ Major Finch, t’ Commanding Officer ”—did yer ivver hear owt so damned soft? But what Ah says is, Gi’ ‘em what they want if theer’s owt to be got out of it. It woan’t hurt yer to coom and bawl a hymn or two.’

‘ I’m not singing hymns to placate anyone.’

‘ More chump you. Nah listen, and Ah’ll tell you fer why. What’s singin’ a hymn? It’s as easy as piddlin’. ’ He looked round upon some of the older men in the room. ‘ Aye, much easier than fer soom o’ these owd fools. And you nivver know what it’ll lead to wi’ soom o’t’ younger officers. T’owd ones are too tough—theer’s no gettin’ much out of them. So you coom along. Get shut o’ yer mucky pride.’ He began to sing softly. “ Lord, Ah hear o’ showers o’ blessin’ Tha art scatterin’ full and free.” See? Easier nor winkin’, so you coom on.’

‘ No.’

‘ No. Just like that! *No.* Ah, weel, tha thinks tha’s proper smart, but mebbe tha’ll be sorry fer it afoor tha’s through. Ah’ll tell you why Ah do it: because it suits me; that’s ma reason, and Ah doan’t feel no shame fer doin’ what suits me, neither. Ah’d nivver keep me job here if Ah didn’t sing the hymns and then sit dahn on me bum and listen to t’ Major talkin’ his muk by t’hour—aye, and say Amen and Hallelujah ivvery nah and then ; and if Ah didn’t clop dahn on me knees as soon as he’s finished his gab, and pray as ’ard as if t’place wur afire. No, Ah’m not ashamed of it. At t’moment, it’s me livin’. Besides, t’Major’s a gentleman in his way, and I don’t want to hurt his feelings, so I beller t’hymns loud enough to crack his lugs. You should come and hear me.’

‘ Well, I won’t. What’s *your* name?’

‘ Deakin. Daniel Deakin fra’ good owd Luddonbridge i’ Yorksheer. Ivver bin to Luddonbridge?’

‘ Never heard of it.’

‘ Weel then, thank yer luky stars. Ah wur nivver aht of it till Ah wur risin’ seventeen.’

Mr. Deakin pulled up a chair, sat himself down upon it and

began to talk at length about himself. And Martin, to whose eyes much reading and much lonely thinking had given a penetrating keenness soon perceived that his informant was of those who can brag by the hour and who probably garnish their bragging, when the mood is on them, with large, handsome and well-placed lies. But he found the man's talk interesting because it made him see a different town from London's East End, a mill town of the North with little houses of blackened stone and streets of damp stone setts, but where the same grey blight of unemployment had stopped the tall mill chimneys smoking and forced the lads, who used to tramp through the dawn to their mills and factories, to stand at street corners in a glum idleness, wondering at eighteen and twenty if there was anything more for them in life but the dole queue. He sat listening with his large eyes on the little shining boot-button eyes of Mr. Deakin.

'Aye, Ah wur in top standard at school but had to go with t'other lads to weaving shed at fourteen. Ah used to start work at six o'clock, often when it wur still dark and starvin' cold, and Ah wur luky if Ah wur hoam agen by six. At first Ah wur given an odd loom to mind, and then two, and then three, and, blimey, Ah began to think Ah wur headin' fer something fine—a tackler or summat—when t'owd War coom along and, like a mug, Ah joined oop. Aye, Ah wur among t'first to join oop, and four'n half years Ah spent at Front.'

'Did you come through all right?' asked Martin, wondering if as much as fifty-per-cent of this was true.

'Did Ah? Course not! Ah wur wounded on Somme and at Arr'us and at Paschendaele, and what did Ah get out of it? Nowt. Just nowt. Ah wur twice recommended for military medal but, blimey, by that time there were so many recommendations they had to pick t'winner aht o' a hat. Into hat it went poor owd Daniel's name, and Ah nivver heard no more o' *that*. Aye, five years of me life Ah gave oop for my country, and three times Ah wur wounded—at Nerve Sha'pell and Arr'us and—er—wheer wur t'other?—at Passchendaele; and look at me now. Demobbed is another word for chucked aht into dust bin.'

'I bet it is.'

'Oh, they gi' me back me job in mill; oh, aye, they did that, but fer hah long? Fer just as long as it suited 'em. Then—laid off, sonny. Aht into street, lad. Try Labour Exchange. If

they've nowt fer you there, well, there's allus t'dole. Line oop for dole wi' t'other mugs.'

'That's right', agreed Martin, 'Just what happened to me,' and he began to speak of John Dawson's—

But Mr. Deakin wanted to go on about Mr. Deakin. 'Aye, fair fed oop Ah wur, and, silly gowk that Ah am, Ah came south to London, thinking Ah'd find work here. Lots o' these lads——' he jerked his head towards the hundred lodgers sitting around—' are chaps from mill or pit who've coom dahn south, thinkin' they'd mak their fortune in London. Dick Whittingtons they are, and Ah'm another. But Ah'm still waitin' around fer me fortune; and fer me mester's lass! All Ah found here was more lads on street corner nor ivver we had at hoam! Ah nivver had a proper job till they heard here—an' Ah saw to it that they heard pretty soon—that Ah wur wunst a local preacher. Ah reely wur, you knew—and no lies! And, lad——' he touched Martin proudly on the knee—' Ah doan't mind tellin' you Ah nivver had ony difficulty in preachin', nor in prayin', neither! Ah could pray by t'yard! You should'a heard what fowks said abaht me sermons and me prayers. But Lord, Ah wur young then. Hahso'ivver, they no sooner heard here that poor owd Daniel Deakin knew all there was to be known abaht preachin' and prayin' than they fell upon him like flies on an owd dead sheep. And you bet Ah wur all they wanted me to be, aye, at first time o' asking. Ah wur washed in the Blood of the Lamb, and Saved like billy-oh, and fair set on t'Salvation of Sinners. And am Ah ashamed of havin' told 'em t'tale a bit? Ah am not, Mr. Martin Herriot; Ah am not. Doan't you think it. Ah'm ready to be anything to please anybody if it means some grub and some brass. Dammit, whativver Ah say or do, Ah stay free in *here*——' and he tapped his breast where his freedom dwelt. It would have been a fine gesture if he hadn't immediately spoiled it with a wink.

'I think you're perfectly right,' said Martin. 'What I say is, Fight the world with every weapon you can find, and to hell with whether it's clean or not.'

'Aye, that's it, lad. And now tell me abaht yerself. You seem a well-spoken sooart of a chap, and educated an' all—quite t'gentleman in your talk—you ought to be able to get work somewhere.'

'I'm no gentleman and never want to be.'

'Go on!' Mr. Deakin pretended amazement. 'Is that so?'

'And I've given up trying to get work. I'm not going to beg from any man the right to clean his doorstep or his boots. I've made up my mind to be my own master or nothing at all.'

'And it looks most like bein' nothin' at all, doan't it? Hah ye off now? Got ony brass at all?'

'I've got a little.'

'Well, nah, listen.' He drew his chair nearer: as for some very confidential advice. 'Doan't you spend owt of it here. After t'Meeting Ah shall be at check box in Dining Room. You coom an' see me there. Ah'll gi' you checks for grub while no one's lookin'—and doan't you worry: it woan't cost me nowt. Ah'll soon have them back from t'food counter. The Salvation Army, baht knowin' it, will be your host tonight. Nay, Ah'm not arguin' wi' you. That's what's going' to happen. Ah mun go now. Ah got to get t'Meetin' Room ready upstairs. Sure you wouldn't like to come t'Meetin'? No? Rather see it in hell? Ah quite understand, laddie. But Ah'm different, tha sees.' And he pointed to the ceiling above them. 'Ah'm goin' aloft to shout aloud Salvation.'

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§

While he was gone Martin remained in his chair, either giving himself to long dreams of greatness or staring up at the exhortations on the walls and enjoying his angry contempt for them.

'There are no Human Preferences with God,' said one; and Martin sneered to himself, 'I wonder? I should have thought he showed some slight preference for the millionaire. But perhaps it's true enough if he doesn't care twopence for any of us.'

'Why not try again? Let God have a chance thi: time,' said the next; and Martin scoffed at it, 'Not likely! I've got some very different schemes from *that*. I can't see God doing anything for me. I've a fancy it's only Martin Herriot who'll do *that*.'

'God knows your Yesterday, your Today, Yet He wants you to place in His hands your Tomorrow.'

This was was straight in front of him, and Martin stared at it, thinking, 'Tomorrow what? My tomorrow—what will it really be? Shall I really be able to do anything big and force myself to the top of the world? I *will*, I *will*; but how do I start? How does anyone *start*?'

By this time he was hearing through the ceiling the sounds of the Service in the Meeting Room above. He heard singing. Men were singing heartily enough, because the tune was 'Marching through Georgia', a hymn which he knew, having often heard it at Salvation Army street-corner meetings in the Mile End Road. He could put the words to it, as the sound of the loud singing came down to him.

Shout aloud Salvation, and
We'll have another song;
Sing it with a spirit
That will start the world along!
Sing it as our comrades sang it
Many a thousand strong,
As they were marching to Glory.

Loud and heartier than ever came the chorus through the ceiling to all these hundred men seated around the Day Room, as it might be an angel host singing above the world of the lost. Not one in this assembly of the world's misfits but sat in silence listening to the familiar tune and perhaps gently tapping a foot to it.

March on, march on! We bring the jubilee;
Fight on, fight on! Salvation makes us free;
We'll shout our Saviour's praises over every land
and sea
As we go marching to Glory.

§

After an hour or so all was silent overhead, and Daniel Deakin appeared at the Dining Room door. He beckoned to Martin and winked twice. And the first words he said to Martin, in a conspirator's whisper, were, 'Look, lad, he done me good, t'Major. Ah'm feelin' proper religious. He preached on "Ah wur naked and ye clothed me"—and, see, have ye got an overcoat? You can't go about without an overcoat. It's starvin' cold at neet sometimes. Ain't you got one?'

'No. Actually I sold mine some days ago; but I'll—'
'But you'll *nothing*. Ah'll gi' you one. Coom along. Ah've preached on that text meseln more'n once, and damned well

too! Convinced meseln that Ah ought to gi' me coat off me back to someone. It's a fact that Ah've nivver preached a sermon wi'ah't leaving meseln a better man. But this here ain't *my* coat. There was an owd clothes dealer here, a Yid, t'other day, and he gave me some of his clobber because Ah wur able to help him, much as Ah'm helpin' you. Coom along oop-stairs.'

He led Martin up a wide stone staircase, past notices saying, 'Silence. No Spitting'; past the doors of long dormitories where Martin could see fifty or sixty beds arranged in long lines, foot to head; past long halls partitioned into cubicles; and so to a long cold passage. Mr. Deakin went creeping down this, with a finger up to enjoin quiet, and whispering, 'If we meet t'Major or t'Lieutenant Ah'm bringing you along to propose you for work here, see. If t'Major thought as Ah wur oop to any games he'd be reet annoyed; aye, he'd say enough to warm the tea in the urn dahnstairs. *Tsh!* this is a Staff Room; this is where owd Daniel and other gentleman-orderlies sleep.'

He grasped the handle of its door, but before turning it listened with an ear against its panelling, and looked left and right along the passage. Then opened it; and they walked in. Martin saw that it was a small oblong room with eight iron beds in it, under pink counterpanes, and eight tall narrow cupboards, or lockers, against the walls. Deakin opened one of these lockers and drew out a long black overcoat that reminded Martin of those worn by rabbis in the Whitechapel Road.

'Try it on, lad. Go on. Doan't be afraid of it.'

'But I can't take it from you,' Martin began.

'Aw, t'hell! Just thee shoot oop! Doan' talk so soft. It's no good to me, tha' can bet thi boots, and tha'rt main welcome to it. Tek it! Tek it, lad. Eh, but tha'rt a card.' Deakin's accent and idioms switchbacked in the most extraordinary way, according to his mood; sometimes, and generally if he was impatient or angry, he lapsed into the deepest Yorkshire dialect; next minute he was up from these depths and speaking a language that seemed a happy blend of his native Luddonbridge Yorkshire and his new Whitechapel Cockney. 'You want to pay me back some day, do you? Well, that'll suit me a treat. Aye, that'll do champion.'

'Yes, if I accept it. It's only as a loan, Mr. Deakin. I assure you I'll pay you back for it one day.'

'Aw reet, aw reet, aw reet; just as you like! Be prah'd if

you want to be. And here's a sailor's jersey. That should keep you warm. Go on; take it. Aye, a loan, if you like; a loan every time. And now come on dahn.'

Down in the Dining Room he led Martin to a counter and, passing to his place behind it, said, 'Well now, happen you're hungry, eh? Fair clemmed, Ah shouldn't wonder? Well, what'd ye like. Roast Beef, threepence. Spoons, three ha'pence. Cabbage, *ditto*. That's only a tanner. And fer afters: Currant duff, a penny. And a mug o' tea? Eightpence, all told. Pass over eightpence in case anyone's looking. I'll give it back to you later. Ta, lad.' He took Martin's coppers and gave him in exchange three metal checks, two worth threepence, and one worth twopence. 'Go on; take 'em to the food counter, and they'll give you the grub. Bring it back to this table here, and you can talk to your Uncle Daniel while you eat. Never mind all that "Mr. Deakin"; Daniel's ma name.'

Martin brought back the food, and Daniel, since no one else seemed to be coming for checks, came and sat himself before Martin at the enamelled-topped table. 'Now tell yer owd uncle: you want to be yer own master; well, hah t'hell are you going to do that?'

'I'm thinking it out.'

'Ah see. Well, think aloud and let me hear.'

And now Martin, touched by Daniel's kindness, did indeed open the floodgates and pour forth all the bitter waters of his mind and, along with these Waters of Marah, the strong, fast-flowing gush of hot Ambition and Resolve. Out of the mouth of this young man came all his hatred and contempt for Socialists and Marxists who preached equality and wanted to curb the strong for the sake of the weak; and for all religions because they preached service and self-sacrifice instead of a ruthlessly selfish struggle, each man for himself, and the devil take the hindmost. Hatred and contempt, in fact, as the shrewd little eyes of Daniel could see, for anything that denied his dream of himself as a man superior to most and entitled to achieve at all costs the success his superiority merited.

'Ruthless struggle is what I believe in, and when I say ruthless, I mean ruthless. I mean using every method that suits you, no matter what the parsons—or even the police—say. Why should I believe in anything else? Please tell me: why should I be other than ruthless in a ruthless universe? If there's a Creator, as you say, everything suggests that he rather rejoices

in pain and cruelty and that his rewards are all for the ruthless. Amongst other contemptuous cruelties he has sentenced us all to death—with probably a little torture beforehand—and for this I do not feel disposed to worship Him. To put it plainly, I don't see why I should praise and glorify His name any more than a hind being clawed to death by a tiger lifts up its voice and praises the universe. Only think of death, Mr. Deakin, and it throws everything into relief like a falling sun. You really see our world then.'

'Ah doan't know as Ah know what you're talkin' abahnt, mate. Reckon you're too clever for me.'

'Well, how's this for an example? Look at some beautiful child playing in a street—so beautiful that you can't help loving her—and so full of the joy of life that she can't help dancing and skipping and shouting and singing—and then think that she's for death and the dust-heap.'

'Aye, it's noan so good. It's a pity.'

'Think that she's really dying every minute as she dances on the pavement. And that she's sentenced to a life of sorrow as she watches her treasured beauty wilting and withering into a wrinkled ugliness. Oh no, it's not good enough! And then death and corruption and the stench of corruption at the end!'

'But if there's a life ah'ter death?' Daniel submitted.

'There's no such thing. Don't you believe it. That would imply that He cares twopence for us; and if you can show me anything in Nature except a complete indifference to our pain I shall be glad to be taken and shown it. In my view, quite the best thing to do would be to decline life on His merciless and humiliating terms and put an end to yourself. But if, somehow you can't quite bring yourself to that, why then, fight for your own hand, and for that only, as long as you have the misfortune to be here. I sometimes think that it would be quite a good thing to prove to the world that you can defeat it, and then kick it contemptuously away, and die. But break it first, or it'll break you. That's what Nature believes in and practises everywhere: she believes in an aristocracy of power and will. Let her alone, and she sees to it that the cream always comes to the top.'

'Aye,' Daniel nodded, fascinated to study this ragged and coatless young man who must clearly think that he was of the cream of mankind. 'Aye, but if cream cooms to top, so does scoom.'

'Scum!' scoffed Martin. 'That's only a question-begging epithet.'

'Now, is it?' Daniel affected surprise that it should be this—just as if he had full understanding of what a 'question-begging epithet' was.

'By scum you only mean what you call bad. Perhaps I don't call it bad. Perhaps I call anything good that'll get me to the top. And it's there that I mean to get: call me scum or cream, as you like.'

'To the top! Just like that!' Daniel grinned, and, screwing up one eye, scanned this young figure with the torn trousers, broken boots, and hungry, haggard face. 'Well, Ah hope you get there, choom. Have ye let t'King know you're coomin' along?'

'Oh, you can laugh. I may be only twenty-one and have done nothing so far, but I know I'm going to do all I want to do. Directly a door opens somewhere I'm going right through it. I'm going to make money somehow—and big money too. By fair means or foul. Probably foul. I'm going to see to it that the world hears of me one day. And I'll tell you this: I'm glad to have been on the street at seventeen, and half starved, and obliged to sell my clothes for a night's bed, and with never a soul anywhere to care a damn about me, because it means that I shall have started on the bottom.'

'Well now that's fine. Hey, but Ah mun go now! Here are some chaps coomin' in fer grub. Ah mun get behind me counter and give 'em their checks. And hell!—here's t'foreman orderly. Yon's him. Ah mun't be seen sittin' here an' crackin' wi' you. Goodbye. Have a good meal and a good kip to-neet. And coom and see us again when you're Prime Minister.'

Daniel went behind his counter and was almost immediately joined by the foreman orderly, a long, lean, middle-aged man, of unlively countenance, but much better clad and manifestly of a better class than his assistant. Daniel sidled along to him and knocked him with his elbow. With a jerk of his head he directed the foreman's attention towards Martin at his table.

'Yon feller's the oddest customer Ah've ivver had in here,' he murmured. 'Take a look at him. He's hardly a shirt to his back or a penny to put a meal in his belly, but he's main sure he's one o't'Boss Class. You should'a just heard him spitting it all ower me. He's one of the Big Men, he is. And one day he's goin' to let t'world know it. He's going to be a very Big

Noise. Not just common like you and me. Something really to write hoam abaht. Ah've given him an overcoat to help him on his road.'

The foreman took a good look at Martin. 'Oh, yes, I know that type,' he said. 'Know it well. Plenty of talk, but nothing to it. Gas; all gas. He's young, but he's getting set in the mould, and soon he'll be fast in it. Never able to keep himself or anyone else. In thirty years' time he'll still be coming in here, or cadging a plate of soup from a night-shelter.'

'Aye.' Daniel nodded. 'Ah reckon that's about t'weight of it.'

§

Just then the sun broke forth and filled the Pavey Ark Hotel with light. Dr. Shelley turned his face to the window. 'The rain has stopped, and it looks like "being a fine afternoon," he said. 'The mist is off the tops, and, friends, my voice is hoarse. I tell too much, too much, but that man I met on the ridge has always fascinated me. Let us go out into the sun.'

He rose and went to the window. I went with him to look at the new bright day. It was bright indeed. All that remained of the rain was the white rain-rush which came over the rocky ridges of the mountains and down the steeps, threading along tortuous courses where we have never seen waterfalls before. Every visible mountain was veined with these strange new runnels, thin and white and glistening. Outside our window the wet valley road was still emptied of footsteps and the only sounds seemed to be the fall of old raindrops and the everlasting sigh of the beck as it scuffed recklessly, and even ruthlessly, towards some place of rest in the great lake beyond.

'If you're at all like me,' said Dr. Shelley, 'I can see some of you climbing to the ridge this afternoon and taking a long look at High Scoat Farm among its trees. I always feel driven to go and look at places about which I have read a story—or heard one. This evening, perhaps, we can go on with the tale. You really wish it? Very well. We shall have the hotel to ourselves, and it'll be pleasant in the garden or by the fire.'

For me it was just as he had said. I felt driven to climb to his Innominate Ridge and look down upon that house high up in the valley. I went alone, because I wanted to be alone. Nor did I stay on the ridge. So interested was I in the doctor's tale

that it put wings on my boots and I climbed Slape quickly and had time to go down into the valley. I walked up that horse-track where Dr. Shelley saw—or dreamed that he saw—figures which in any earthly sense were not there; and I was foolish enough to hope that my deep interest might have quickened my vision so that I too would see, if only for a second, a beautiful wraith upon the path. But of course there was nothing there for me: only the steep little lane as he had described it, with the flowers under its tangled hedges and the runnel of ale-brown water tumbling down its stony gutter to the beck.

I was back at the Pavey Ark Hotel by tea-time, as were all the others; and after tea, in the pleasant evening light, we took our hammock chairs into the garden and placed them in a ring under the sycamore. And Dr. Shelley, flattered by the inquiring interest in our eyes, said merrily, ‘Well, children, let us continue;’ and he crossed his thick legs comfortably and resumed the tale.

PART II

NINE years later Martin Herriot came again to Hagen Street. But not in old cast-off garments; not in an old Jew's greasy overcoat much too long for him; he came in clothes that fitted him perfectly and had clearly been cut to his measure by most expensive hands. In black jacket, grey striped trousers, grey silk tie, and bowler hat of a fine black sheen, he might have been a Member of Parliament coming from the House or an executive going to a board meeting. No, perhaps Member of Parliament will not do, because his black beard, trimmed now, and his black hair must have given him something of a foreign appearance. The beard, built up of imperial, chin-fringe, and moustache must have seemed particularly foreign. It was the beard of Lenin—but his eyes were not the slant eyes of Lenin. Herriot's eyes were large orbs with strange deeps in them; often they were lit by a suppressed sardonic humour. Gushing women, I am told, used to call them 'haunting eyes,' 'piercingly beautiful eyes' and even 'hypnotic eyes.' Berl's mother at a later date spoke of them to me as 'the most melancholy and beautiful eyes she had ever seen.' But then Mrs. Mickiewicz had always loved him.

Today he did not slink past the house-windows of Hagen Street; he walked with the ease and self-assurance of a successful man. There was purpose in his rapid stride as he walked towards the house that had been Berl's.

It was a fine autumn evening, and the street was full of playing children as ever it had been in the past. Some of them must have been babies in prams, or yet unborn, when he walked out of Hagen Street nine years before. Forgetting the years, he found himself searching among them for a brown and gold head and a brown school uniform: then remembered. He came to Berl's door and tapped on it. Who would open it: a stranger, Mrs. Mickiewicz, Berl? As he stood there waiting, he looked at the grating in the pavement and at the window within it, behind which was that murky underground room. . . . The window was grimed again now.

He was completely frank when he told me (walking in the Berce How woods under Hanging Nab) of this return to Hagen Street; he had come, he said, to learn if Berl still lived there and, if so, to display before him all his success in the world beyond Stepney. After this service to Berl he intended to show himself to his old father in Tribe Street. He had a good biblical precedent for this: did not Joseph say to his brethren, ‘Ye shall tell my father of all my glory in Egypt.’

The door opened, and there was Berl; little Berl, no bigger, no more beautiful, but brightly dressed in a wide-shouldered, small-waisted suit of an almost Mediterranean blue.

Coming carelessly into the light of the street, Berl did not at once recognise the trim-bearded stranger at the door. ‘Yes?’ he inquired, as if wondering what this manifest ‘nob’ could want at the door of his home.

Martin compressed his lips to prevent a smile. ‘Is this where Mr. and Mrs. Mickiewicz live?’ he asked in a voice low and easy and very different from the angry accents of old.

‘Yes.’

‘And young Mr. Berl Mickiewicz?’

‘Yes.’

‘Could I speak to young Mr. Berl?’

‘Yes. Is it something important?’

‘Oh no. No, I don’t think so. Nothing of the least importance. No, no; don’t imagine that.’

‘I am Berl Mickiewicz.’

‘Go on, Berly! Are you really? You don’t say so! Well, God bless my soul!’

Berl stared, frowned, and recognised him. ‘*You.*’

‘Yes. Martin Herriot. Once your grateful guest.’

‘Martin Herriot, by all that’s holy! Come *in*, come *in!*’

‘On the contrary, you come out,’ laughed Martin.

‘But, Martin . . .’ Berl stared at the perfect clothes.

‘How. . . ?’

§

You also will want to know how. It is not a pretty part of my story, but if a man has come to terms with Evil and has henceforth no quarrel with it, this will hardly produce flowers that are pretty or fruit that is sweet.

One evening, shortly after his meeting with Daniel Deakin

in the Salvation Army hostel, he walked into the saloon bar of a public house in the East India Dock Road, wearing that over-long overcoat from Deakin's store, and offered for sale among the crowding drinkers there his painted pictures of their chosen house. He was not very successful, selling only two at sixpence apiece, but as he went out, disappointed, into the night, a man followed him, a tall weedy, rather stealthy and unsavoury gentleman. 'Hey, mate!' he called after him.

Martin stopped and turned. 'Yes?'

The man caught up with him, and they walked on together through the darkness.

And as they walked on together, the man submitted to him in stumbling, guilty, evasive tones a proposition which, you will agree, was well suited to the darkness and to the low whispering voice in which he uttered it. It was an astonishing proposition. This man was engaged in a traffic of which Martin (though he imagined he knew the worst about his fellows) had never heard, and of which you, my dear children, will certainly know nothing. He was working for a domestic agency in Graftham Street which, among some quite reputable activities, would sometimes—oh, well, let me state it quite simply: it was his business to act as a 'talent scout' and search among the out-of-works for good-looking young men who could be groomed for the nominal part of chauffeur or secretary or manservant to certain ageing and lonely women, but whose real office was to serve as gigolo, cicisbeo, cavaliere servente—call it what you will. Apparently—and this astonished me as much as Herriot twenty years before—some of these ladies desired for their servants powerful young labourers of dockside build; and some even desired that they should be gentlemen of colour.

Now Martin was exceptionally good-looking; he spoke like an educated man; his abandonment of all conflict with the evil within him had given him something of the poise of an integrated man; and this agent had immediately spotted him as likely merchandise for his master.

'It's money for jam,' he said, as they walked through the thrumming darkness of the East India Dock Road. 'Ever thought of it?' All a fellow had to do was to make a bit of love, he explained, with his wordy, oily, insinuating advocacy; and if a chap like Martin played his cards well with some starved old cat, there was no knowing to what it might not lead. The old fools often fell hopelessly in love with their handsome young

' secretaries ', and if Martin could work this lark with his employer, she might set him up in style somewhere. In no time he might be able to twist her round his fingers and get out of her all that he wanted.

So spake the devil's messenger at his elbow, whispering in the darkness. And what grain of mustard seed was planted then! Other lads had done well out of it, said this quiet procurer. It was money for jam. And might be big money. Might be anything on earth. The Lord Himself only knew what might not come of it. Interested, was he ? Ready to come in ? Ready to come and see the Boss at his office in Graftham Street ?

Martin's answer was instantaneous. Possibly it was more instantaneous than this slippery pimp expected. Possibly it slightly shook him.

' Of course I am,' he said. ' What do I care what I do, so long as there's money in it? '

§

And what that seedy tempter whispered in his ear was exactly what Martin Herriot did.

The agency's client to whom he was sent as ' secretary ' was a retired actress of more than fifty, fairly prominent at one time on the West End stage, but now forgotten. Twenty five years before this she had married an ironmaster of great wealth, thereby exchanging her future on the stage, which probably she half-knew to be precarious, for a lifetime of luxury and security. The marriage, a childless one, had run over the roughest country for nineteen years, pitching into deep quarrels, struggling through long estrangements, till at last the ironmaster had brought about a divorce, but only at the cost of an enormous provision for the deserted wife. Thus the lady was now a woman of ample fortune with only herself to support in her large luxury flat in Mayfair. At fifty her beauty, never of the first order, had all collapsed and cracked and worn away, and all that her powder, paint and henna'd hair, her eye-shadow and mascara, her diamanté earrings and pearl necklaces achieved was an emphasis on the ruin. The more merciless of her friends spoke of her as an enamelled and powdered old harridan. One thing only remained of her grace behind the footlights, and this was a beauty of movement and gesture; but

this, suited to the stage, always appeared somewhat exaggerated in drawing-room or street.

From her flat in Upper Audley Street she would issue forth, with all this grace, and with not a little gush, to one or another form of social work. She served on the committees of the Actresses' Provident Fund, the Siddons Home for Elderly Actresses, the Royal Actors' Orphanage, and the Amateur Stage Society. Moreover, much enamoured of a local vicar, the incumbent of St. Giles's, Mayfair, whose interest in the stage was the best known thing about him, she did some gushing work for him, reading the manuscripts of pretty bad plays which he had written, helping him produce morality plays in his church and taking a stall at his annual bazaar.

With all these manifold affairs littering her desk, it seemed plausible enough that she should require the occasional services of a secretary; and this young man, who came to her regularly of an evening from his bachelor apartment in New Welbeck Street, was Martin Herriot. She had kennelled him in those pleasant chambers, not eight hundred yards from her home, precisely as her husband, after she could satisfy him no more, had kept a young mistress at an easy distance from his office.

And very soon she was in that secretary's power; completely in his power. Martin had seen at once that a gate into really fat pastures was open before him, and he ran nimbly through and set about developing the new estate. Cynically, and very secretly, driven by his grim single purpose, he exploited his opportunity. Wearing a mask of boyish affection, devotion and gaiety, he quickly enough reached his first objective: he had the old woman hopelessly in love with him. This had not been difficult. Given her disappointments and hungers, and his fine-featured face, bright intelligence, well-stocked mind, and gay affection, it was only a few weeks before she was infatuated. Then skilfully he played upon her love and her fears. He had but to be moody at times, and appear unhappy about his position, for her to offer him anything he hinted at. Nor was it difficult to play upon her daily fear that their relationship might be uncovered. In her vanity she liked to believe that among the older theatre-goers she was remembered with love and admiration; that among the high-society ladies on her committees and at her church she was thought of as a *grande dame*; and that the beneficiaries of her charities worshipped her. It would be awful to be made ridiculous in the eyes of her 'dear public';

awful to be cast forth from their city by her many friends in Mayfair. Did Martin, by a hint of weariness and readiness to go, start up this fear that he was losing his love for her and might depart and carry their tale abroad, she was at his feet with wild offers of anything, everything, he wanted. And no objection at all had Martin to this easy blackmail. His purpose was to milk the old cow much more vigorously before he gently thrust her aside and waved her farewell.

She might be an old professional, but now she had in her rooms an actor as good as she. Acting a charming good-fellowship, Martin would unload before her all his ambitions and dreams, in a way that he was well aware would touch her heart. His ambition, he said, was to be an art-dealer. Pictures were his love; he would have liked to be an artist himself, but had learned that he was nothing like good enough, and had better handle the works of abler men. Charming modesty! And fascinating the dream that he laid before her! His idea was to start in a small way with *objets d'art*—porcelains, bronzes, tapestries, pieces of old French furniture, with of course a few fine pictures—till at last he could really break into the picture-dealers' world. The endearing confidences streamed forth—but behind all this rushing, warm, excited talk was the cold calculation that objects of virtu could often earn a hundred or two hundred-per-cent profit, and pictures could sometimes collect a thousand-per-cent., and more. Were there not tales of Impressionist pictures—those of Pissarro, Monet, or Degas—being bought for a thousand francs and sold to national collections, provincial art galleries, or American millionaires for ten, twenty, or thirty thousand pounds? Pictures were the currency that should bring him wealth.

And the poor, raddled lady, touched by his confidences and his declamatory delight in her sympathy, was soon as enthusiastic as he for the project. She too had a secret calculation behind her gushing enthusiasm: here was a way of holding him captive with bands of indebtedness and of dependence on her purse. And more: this activity of his would serve as camouflage: there would be less danger of scandal and ridicule, if people thought of him as her protégé rather than as her secretary.

Well, she set him up in a shop in Earle Street, suitably close to the Wallace Collection. More and more he had enkindled her enthusiasm, so that when the shop opened it was beautifully equipped and stocked. Illuminated vitrines hung in every

alcove displaying Meissen, Ansbach and Frankenthal porcelain; on the fitted grey carpet, overlaid with Persian rugs, stood satin-wood display cabinets and many pieces of French seventeenth-century furniture, all Boulle panels and gilt bronze mounts; in the fitted wall-cases and on the tops of the furniture were Italian and French bronzes; and on the grey damask walls a few fine tapestries and ‘the few fine pictures.’ Indeed it was as if the Wallace Collection itself had been suddenly brought to bed and dropped this lamb at its side.

And the name of this art-shop so tastefully equipped and dressed? Herriot’s? Mr. Martin Herriot’s? No. Martin remembered his home in Omar Square and, enjoying the jest in the privacy of his bosom, called it the Omar Galleries.

§

The Omar Galleries were not slow in gaining a clientele and earning a profit. The lady in Upper Audley Street, her enthusiasm kept alight by Martin, recommended his wares to all her wealthy friends, and Martin’s striking appearance, and his studied charm of manner, played their part in bringing idle and interested women through his doors, all of whom he cheated in a large way. At first, though he allowed no one to perceive this, he was very nervous of failure, but so huge were the profits which *objets d’art* could distil from society ladies that he had only to sell a few porcelains, a few bronzes, a few bas-reliefs and busts, to begin climbing out of his pit of debt towards the sunny surface of a credit balance. But not till he had gathered a clientele of picture-buyers did the credit balance begin to mount and mount like a golden slag-tip at the side of his operations.

Then Martin, hardly able to believe that at last he was a man of money, and on the way to becoming a man of wealth, would spend secret, closeted hours with pencil and paper, counting up his present capital and all the increases he could pile on to it in the coming year. So incredible did the total seem that he would get up and walk around his apartment, remembering the school in St. Mary Lane and the little terrified boy there; remembering the Labour Exchange and a shabby applicant constantly turned away.

‘I suppose I am the same person,’ he smiled to himself, ‘but it’s difficult to believe.’

His money bred money with the fidelity and fertility of a stud of rabbits, and he spent it on nothing but his business—which term included his clothes and his hairdressing. So single was his purpose that his life had no room for vices: he neither smoked nor drank nor dallied with women; everything in him was canalised into the entralling purpose of piling up that golden tip-heap. From morning till night he was as ascetic as an athlete in training.

The single purpose would send him on quiet, smooth-faced, disarmingly modest—aye, sycophantic, since sycophancy suited him—courtships of art critics, directors of galleries, celebrated artists, and famous picture dealers, that he might quietly suck from them all the knowledge they had to give. They did not perceive what this young and charmingly modest admirer was up to, but like a beaver in the stream-bank, he was gnawing, gathering, building. And soon in his sealed and scheming mind he saw the one track along which he could overtake and pass ahead of his stronger competitors. He saw what the new fashion would be; that is to say, he saw what was the new movement already in being and certain to become fashionable. It was the movement that looked to Cézanne as its Paramount Chief. He saw that just as great moneys had been made in speculative buying of Impressionist paintings, so now the money would gather about the paintings of the Post-Impressionists: of Derain, Matisse, Vlaminck, Picasso, Bonnard and the Douanier Rousseau. Already good prices were mounting around them, and the day was not far when these would reach the five-figure level. He bought. He bought such pictures while the prices were still too cheap to attract the art galleries or the millionaires. Very nervously he bought at first lest his judgment was leading him astray; and often he sold too soon because he was anxious to build up again the capital which he had depleted. But the times were with him. They were times when money was depreciating and careful men were putting their profits into diamonds and antiques and anything which they believed must maintain or increase its value. Martin with his beautiful manners and his specious reasoning persuaded some of them to stow their money safely in pictures.

It is probable that his advice served them well in the end, but all that interested him was that it was serving him admirably at the moment.

The really rapid success of the Omar Galleries began when a

motor magnate got word of Martin's taste in art and his skill in buying and walked into the Earle Street shop. He was a man who had risen from being a mere engineer's apprentice to the chairmanship of his own great firm of motor manufacturers, was already a baronet, and would soon be a millionaire. And a peer. With all the diffidence of a self-made man he suggested that Martin, this expert, this properly educated fellow, should assemble a small collection of fine pictures for the great house he was building on the Surrey hills. And picture after picture Martin showed and sold him, remembering all the time a hawker of painted postcards in East End streets.

This customer, well satisfied, introduced others of his kind, who used Martin as their expert and broker. And sometimes Martin, learning by underground channels when the collection of a dead squire, a needy nobleman, or a bankrupt financier was likely to come into the market, would buy the whole collection for a lump sum, so that none of his shrewd customers could ascertain what an individual item had cost. The good items he then sold for three or four hundred times what their proportion of the lump sum must have been; the outmoded stuff he let go at a smaller profit—perhaps not more than a hundred-per-cent—to those who did not know that a fashion had changed.

How, you wonder, did he get money for these great purchases? Not from his own balance, big though this now was; and not from the lady in Upper Audley Street, for he was now sailing in waters where even her large and well-found galleon could not venture at all. No, it was the City banks and the big Insurance companies who financed him now, so high was his reputation for probity.

Besides, he had done with the lady. It was somewhere about this time that he left her behind and out of sight and—with relief—out of memory. It had not been difficult to contrive a quarrel, reject as gently as possible her desperate proposal of marriage, offer with dignity to repay all that she had advanced him, and walk from her presence for ever. He left her prostrate, hysterical, and threatening suicide; but he had no doubt, and rightly so, that in time she would find and buy consolation.

All this time the great art dealers hardly noticed his activities and his steady creeping advance. They did not hear the feet of this young man approaching. If they knew of him at all they saw him as a very young man in a small way who could never muster a host large enough to invade their empires. In these

later days none of them knew him personally; he'd long ago sucked dry the brains of a few of them and needed their instruction no more. None of them knew him, and he knew none of them: indeed, wrapped in himself, he hardly knew anyone at all except his staff and his customers. And in this closed group he had no intimate friends; he was as alone still as when he tramped the road from workhouse to workhouse. It is possible that in all London there was no one so preoccupied and self-absorbed, so uninterested and impotent socially and convivially, as this well-dressed worker in his well-dressed shop. He could be lively with one man but never convivial with many.

The emperors of the art world only awoke to him as a threat when he outbid them all for a Seurat and his bid was a newspaper sensation. Martin read the headlines in all the papers and immediately advanced the price of everything in his shop and his stock room. Then, since he could hide his threat no more, he moved from the small but elegant shop in Earle Street to spacious and lordly galleries off Bond Street. So proud was he in his secret unspied heart of these stately rooms with the few fine pictures on easels and walls and with a staff of salesmen in morning coats and grey striped trousers walking the soft pile carpets, that he was driven—driven irresistibly—to search out Berl Mickiewicz and show him all his glory in the land of Egypt.

§

'Martin Herriot, by all that's holy! Come *in*, come *in*!' said Berl enthusiastically.

'On the contrary, you come *out*,' laughed Martin.

'No. Mum must see you. Dad's out at the market. Mum, here's a stranger at the door. Come quick. A stranger from another world. It's a messenger from Mars.'

'Just coming,' called Mrs. Mickiewicz from the kitchen in a high-pitched voice.

'Come into the parlour, Martin.' And Berl led the way into that tiny front room. Martin had no doubt that Berl was thinking that for a caller in such good clothes their Sunday-best room was the only place to receive him. The room did not seem the least different from what it had been nineteen years before when the eleven-year-old Martin first entered it: one could imagine that it had never been used since then but only dusted and polished and carefully blinded from the sun. Its

cheap furniture and shining linoleum still smelt strongly of furniture cream and floor polish. He looked around upon its carefully guarded distinction and its soberly restrained colours, and remembered the abandoned room below, in its twilight and dust. As Martin sank into an easy chair Mrs. Mickiewicz came bustling in. She *had* changed in the years: plump in the old days, she was now obese and waddled as if her weight were too great for her legs. But her face was still as beautiful as Berl's was ugly and, because of its fat, still round and youthful. Her black Jewish eyes had the old gentleness.

She stared at Martin. 'It's . . . it's . . . it's never Martin Herriot.'

'Yes, it is, Mum. And what a gent he looks, eh?'

'You're in good work, are you, Martin?' She sank on to a hard chair by the table, breathing heavily. 'I'm so glad. You've really got a job?'

'Well . . . yes, Mrs. Mickiewicz.'

'Still selling pictures?' she asked mischievously.

He smiled too. 'Yes. That's exactly what I *am* doing. But good pictures this time. Not my own rotten daubs.'

'I thought you painted very nicely.'

'Where do you sell them?' asked Berl, who'd half-seated himself on the table. 'In a shop, like?'

'Yes . . . it's a shop. Of sorts. And you, Berly, what are you doing?'

'Oh, I'm still a waiter. But I'm in fairly steady work now.'

'He's on the banqueting staff of the Royal Aldwych Hotel,' supplied his mother.

'And what does that mean?'

'It means,' said Berl, 'the best part of ten hours getting ready for a banquet and then, if there's a dance afterwards, being kept till two or three in the morning. It means being damned servile and obsequious——'

'Oh, *Berl!*' chided his mother, a pious Jewess who could be shocked even by the word 'damn'.

'Servile and obsequious to vulgar and purse-proud people, putting on their coats for them, handing them their hats, and bowing them out, all for the sake of a tip.'

'There's nothing shameful in being polite,' suggested Mrs. Mickiewicz.

'Depends what you do it for,' amended Berl.

'It's not a job that I like to see him doing, I confess,' said

Mrs. Mickiewicz. ‘But what can a lad do these days? I’m sure *you* understand that, Martin, if anyone does.’

‘I do. I do.’

‘And now you’ve got a job too. That’s good. And if you’ll take an old woman’s advice you’ll hold on to it tight. It’s no time to be proud, these days. Just you hold on to it.’

‘That’s the ticket,’ agreed Berl. ‘And I shall hold on to mine. You bet! I’ve had all the unemployment I want. No more plodding round the agencies if I can help it, and certainly no more shuffling along in queues outside the Labour Exchange. I can at least buy a decent suit now. And apparently you can too, Martin.’

‘What do you make at it?’

Berl shrugged. ‘With tips, perhaps, three quid a week, or three-ten. It’s not much after ten years at the game. But I’ll never get any more anywhere else. There’s a lot against me. I can see that.’

‘Such as what?’

‘Well, I’m very short, and that’s no help. And I’m no beauty as you may have noticed. And then I’m much too obviously the Jew. You can see that,’ he laughed, ‘by the nose on my face.’

Martin saw how all this must tell against him but he did not say so aloud; nor show any agreement in his face.

And Berl went on. ‘Then there’s all this competition from the Italians and the Swiss who’ll work almost for nothing.’

‘We mustn’t grudge them their jobs,’ said Mrs. Mickiewicz. ‘We were foreigners once. And we were allowed to earn what we could.’

‘Yes, but you and Dad came to stay. These chaps only come to go. And when they go, others come pouring in. It simply means that I shall be lucky if I can keep my present job, and that I’ve absolutely no hope ever of getting anything better.’

‘Yes, it’s not much of a prospect for a boy,’ his mother lamented.

It was at this moment that a thought came to Martin; a thought which gave him quite extraordinary pleasure. If he had found words for the thought they would have been, ‘My hand may be against the whole world, but it’s not against old Berl. My God, no. It’s on Berl’s side, always. He was good to me in the old days. He has everything against him as a salesman; I can see that. He’s pretty hideous, he’s undersized,

and he's quite unnecessarily Semitic in feature, but what do I care? The world's not going to dictate to me whom I shall employ in my galleries. I forced myself on to the world, and if I want to, I shall force old Berl.' The very fact that the world might disapprove of, and object to, old Berl heightened his pleasure, making it a kind of merry exultation because he enjoyed defying and defeating the world. He'd been so successful in everything he'd touched that he now began to believe he had the ability and the force to do anything he willed to do. That arrogance was establishing itself in him, which says, 'The world isn't going to dictate to me. It's I that shall dictate to the world.'

'But,' thought he, as he looked at Berl, 'we shall have to do something about that bright blue suit. That would ruin the Omar Gallaries. Not even I could force that upon the world.'

Nothing of what was in his mind did he show as yet to Berl, but this most pleasing thought had drawn him down so deep into himself that he missed much of what Berl was saying. He came quickly to the surface, however, when he caught the words, 'It's not much fun being at work night after night when everybody else is playing. It means you can never have a date with a young lady.'

'Ah!' laughed Martin. 'And is there someone in view?'

'No,' said Berl.

'What a fool I am! I've never asked you the chief question. I'm not married myself, and it never occurred to me that you might be. But here you are: thirty, like me. You're not married, are you?'

'No,' said Berl.

'Poor boy, he's never had much chance,' Mrs. Mickiewicz put in. 'He's always felt he ought to stay at home and help us. His father's an old man now, you see.'

'There was never anyone I wanted to marry,' Berl declared, to comfort her.

'Oh, yes, there was. You know there was.' Mrs. Mickiewicz turned to Martin. 'He's never cared but for one girl, you see.'

'And she wasn't for me. Or for anyone like me.'

'She's very fond of you,' said his mother.

'Yes, but not in that way. She's too grand for me now.'

'And who was she?' asked Martin.

'Oh, a kid who lives in this street.'

‘Her name?’

‘Helga. Though I always call her Lindy. Her surname’s Lindgren.’

Nothing in Martin’s face, nothing in his words, showed that he recognized the name, or had any interest in it. So Berl had quite forgotten his, Martin’s, interest in little Helga! Berl had never known that his guest in the basement used to watch her at play, for hours on end, peeping above the pavement; never known that sometimes he would walk towards her, while his heart said desperately, ‘Helga . . . Helga . . . Helga . . .’ His heart now, at the mention of her name, had quickened its beat, but he only asked with a casual air, ‘What? That beautiful child with the gold-streaked hair? I remember her well. Playing cross-touch with the boys. Is she as beautiful as ever?’

‘Oh yes . . . oh yes. . . .’ Berl said it sadly. ‘Yes, she’s beautiful.’

‘She has a very lovely face, certainly,’ Mrs. Mickiewicz allowed, ‘but I don’t see as how she’s any more beautiful than lots of others. She could do with more colour in her face, to my thinking; and more character—though that may come, o’course. But she’s evidently the kind men lose their heads about. Even old Father and old Mr. Bornheim call her “The Beauty of Hagen Street.”’

As she said this, the old love flooded Martin, and his body shook with it. Fortunate that this imprisoned folly was hidden from the eyes of Berl and his mother. ‘Then she’s still in Hagen Street?’ was all he said.

‘Yes, for a little while longer.’ Berl was not looking at them now but gazing dreamily through the window.

‘And she’s married, I suppose?’ Absurd that a question about a slip of a child not seen for years, and never once spoken to, could hurt so much.

‘No, she’s not married.’

Absurd the relief, the great and sweet relief. Why did he suffer these pains and pleasures as he list’ned to talk about a child? Was it that she had always been for him a symbol of something else that he wanted from the world, something that was neither wealth nor power. Something beautiful to love him, and for him to love? ‘I should have thought she’d have been married long ago,’ he said.

‘She’s only twenty-two.’

Whereat Martin thought, ‘But usually girls in a poor street

like this get married before twenty-two.' This was not something he could say aloud, so he merely asked, 'What does she do? Does she work somewhere?'

'She's gone ahead like a house on fire. Her dad and mum always meant that she should. She stayed at school till she was seventeen and then went to a secretarial training college, from which she walked into a job at her dad's printing works.' Berl turned a thumb vaguely towards the East. 'Away there in Bromley.'

'The Marcus Press, wasn't it?'

'Yes. God bless my soul: fancy you remembering that! Yes, her old man's been there thirty-odd years, and his bosses think no end of him. He's Overseer of the Composing Room now. So they welcomed his little daughter and promised that, if she shaped well as a typist, they'd make her into a secretary.'

'Secretary? To whom?' Now it was jealousy that he was suffering; jealousy like a knife's blade.

'Oh, to one of the directors, or to the Secretary of the firm. And that's just what she managed to do. She's secretary now to the Chairman and Managing Director himself.'

'She is, is she? It's her beauty that's done it.'

'Not only. She's quite a simple and unsophisticated kid in some ways, but she's very capable and very ambitious. She's quite determined to make the most of herself—I can see that. That's why she's getting out of Hagen Street.'

'Oh, she's going from here, is she?' Fear now; a sharp fear.

'Yes, she's earning her five quid a week and she's going to live in a Ladies' Residential Club, if you please!'

'Where?'

'In Thurloe Gardens, off the Brompton Road. Quite a swell part. The Royal Borough of Kensington. She's done with our poor old borough of Stepney.'

'She's had lovers in plenty, I suppose?'

'Oh lord, yes! Lovers ten deep.'

Again that pain lest a dream-hope were shattered. He could hardly ask his next question for fear of its answer. And, anyway, how was he to phrase it in the hearing of the pious Mrs. Mickiewicz? 'Lovers in the full sense, do you mean?'

'Oh, no! Gracious, no!' said Berl; and 'God in pity, no,' said Mrs. Mickiewicz. 'Not our Helga. She's a good girl.'

And oh, the relief, the ridiculous relief. Why so? Was it that he wanted that citadel inviolate for himself?

'Not our Lindy.' Berl echoed his mother. 'She knows her value. She's a very haughty young lady, and she'd soon show her contempt for any lad who hinted anything like that to her—if she didn't laugh in his face, either mocking him or pitying him. No, there's no boy here who'll have her. She's not for lads like you and me, Martin.'

So! Berl still thought of him as a poor working lad from Stepney. What a surprise was coming to him when he saw the Omar Galleries. But let that wait. 'Maybe, Berl; but what about that old Chairman and Managing Director?'

'He's fifty and married, with two sons in the firm.'

Martin glanced once at Mrs. Mickiewicz but decided he could ask without offence to her, 'Is that any protection?'

'Lindy's protection is in herself. She'll never give herself on those terms. Not to any living soul. She knows what she's worth, and besides, she was strictly brought up by Mr. and Mrs. Lindgren. I can't see the man who'd get her on those terms.'

In that moment Martin knew that he was going to look for her and see if he—did it not seem as if all things were possible to him?—see if he could not be the one who'd get her on those terms. What a thrilling pastime for his days it would be, attempting this. And what a triumph of triumphs if he won the game.

'She's waiting for something good,' said Berl.

'I see.' With his determination had come rest. Nothing to do now but wait on the future. He was ready to change the subject, and anxious to do so. 'Berl, you said this was your afternoon off. Come and see the shop; if it's worth calling a shop. And then have a slap-up meal with me. Now I come to think of it, I owe you a meal. You gave me one ten years ago at Uncle Jim's: Civility and Quick Service. Come, old chap.' He rose. 'I've a proposition to make to you.'

'What's that?'

'I'll tell you when you've seen the shop. At dinner. So come on.'

'Yes, you go along, dear,' encouraged Mrs. Mickiewicz.

'Well, I must have a rinse first and get respectable.' Berl rose too. 'You look so damned smart!'

'Now, Berl!'

'You wait here, Martin. With Mum. And moderate your language because she doesn't like swearing.'

'No, Berl, your mother's busy. I'll go out and walk in the last of the daylight. I'll be waiting for you in the street.' He said this because there was something he wanted to do in Hagen Street. 'Goodbye, Mrs. Mickiewicz. It's been wonderful seeing you again.'

'Wonderful to see you, Martin; in good work again; and happy. I'm so pleased.'

Out in Hagen Street, among the children at play, who ran and screamed and skipped on the kerb just like those children of ten years ago, he walked slowly towards the house which he remembered to be Helga Lindgren's. Slowly he approached her doorstep and recalled her sitting gracefully upon it with her head against the doorpost and one knee between her hands. Was she going to be his? That lovely child! What was she like now? Still more slowly he came level with her window. Evening now; was she in the little parlour behind the window? There was a light in there, but cheap blue curtains had already been drawn across it, behind the curtains of Nottingham lace. He paused on the pavement, pretending to be in two minds whether to turn about and walk the other way. Was she in there, only a few feet from him, behind the curtains, dreaming perhaps (as one was told all beautiful young women did) of love, and of the perfect lover, who would one day come for her? Did two ambitions, two dreams of a transcendent love, stand close to each other now, one on either side of that narrow windowsill; one within; one without?

§

There was only one way. He couldn't loiter about Hagen Street day after day in the hope of seeing her, and he couldn't ask Berl with a blush to bring about a meeting with a girl who was a schoolchild when last he saw her. But there was this way—yes, and it was an exciting way.

He sat brooding in his little office at the Omar Galleries. This was not a large room, but it was luxurious. The desk at which he sat was a splendid eighteenth-century French writing table, with Boulle marquetry and gilt mounts. Before him was a Louis XVI inkstand in red porphyry and green serpentine. His chair was of carved and gilt wood upholstered with Beauvais tapestry. Against the grey damask wall, in front of his eyes, stood a secretaire of oak veneered with tulip wood and purple

wood, and ornamented with the inevitable bronze mounts chased and gilt. Perhaps there was somewhat too much of gilt in the room but one must remember that it was but a decade since he left his Omar Square home, and a pendulum can swing violently before it finds a quiet rhythm.

Very incongruous was the new-model telephone on the Boulle marquetry. Martin stretched out a hand towards it, but did not at once pick up the receiver. Instead he rested his arms on the table and brooded a while longer; then picked up the receiver and touched a button. ‘Get me the Marcus Press, please, Mary. Marcus Press, Bromley; and ask if I can speak to Mr. Salvesen, the Managing Director.’

He replaced the receiver. It might be that she would answer him. Why not? The Managing Director’s secretary. Her voice—he had never heard it except when she was at play in the street, running from a pursuer and screaming to high heaven. Or dimly, through the ceiling of her kitchen, when she was being comforted by Berl in the room above. Would it keep traces of a Hagen Street accent? Probably not—after that convent school and training college. Why, Berl’s voice—and he’d had to educate himself—carried no savour of Stepney any more.

He tried to turn to other work but could not take his eyes from the telephone. He waited, watching it and trembling.

A ring. ‘Your call, Mr. Herriot. The Marcus Press. The Managing Director’s secretary to speak to you.’

‘Mr. Herriot?’

‘Yes. Speaking.’

‘Mr. Martin Herriot? Good morning. This is Mr. Salvesen’s secretary speaking.’ Ah, good: a voice charming in quality and modulations: feminine, young, soft—consciously, studiously soft. And this was the voice that used to scream in Hagen Street! Nothing conscious or studied about it then! ‘I’m sorry, but Mr. Salvesen isn’t in the office today. Can I take a message for him?’

‘Yes. Do please.’ At last, at last, he was talking to that child of yesterday—and how the world would laugh if it knew how sweet he was finding this brief and blind exchange. *She* had no knowledge whose was the disembodied voice calling her; no knowledge that it was the voice of the ragged and bearded youth at whose queer figure she had once laughed, and led her friends in laughter, and certainly no knowledge that it was the

voice of one who wanted to come close to her, as Faust came close to Marguerite. ‘Look: are you still there?’

‘Yes;’ and she laughed at him; but very different, this laugh of appreciation, from that laugh of ridicule long ago. ‘What was your message, Mr. Herriot?’

‘It’s this. I’m wanting to get a brochure made about a famous picture I’m offering for sale—a really beautiful brochure, on special paper, with a full history of the picture, and, if Mr. Salvesen agrees, a reproduction in colour. A printing in five colours, possibly. And I’m assured nobody does this kind of thing as well as you do.’

Now her laugh was one of mannerly deprecation. ‘Well, we certainly do a lot of that kind of work.’

‘So I’m told. Then I think that, on the whole, the best way would be for me to come and talk it over with Mr. Salvesen.’

‘He’d be delighted to see you, I’m sure.’

‘Good. Then will you ring and tell my secretary when I can come?’

‘I certainly will.’

‘And the sooner the better, if possible. I’m most anxious to get on with this business.’

‘I’m pretty sure he’ll be free tomorrow. In the afternoon—would the afternoon suit you, Mr. Herriot?’

‘Perfectly.’

And the following afternoon Martin’s long, blue Daimler rolled silently towards the main doors of the Marcus Press in River Lea Street, Bromley. Deliberately he stayed in his seat, arranging some papers, till his chauffeur should open the door for him. Who knew but what she was looking from a window, and he desired that she should see his car, his uniformed chauffeur, and the chauffeur’s deferential service. He was capable of despising this piece of self-display but not capable of resisting it. As with his somewhat too richly appointed office, so with his car and chauffeur and clothes: he could still feel within himself the little beaten Omar Square boy; still remember the rags of a tramp upon his back; and car and chauffeur and clothes must compensate for these.

The door drawn open for him, he slipped forth and crossed the pavement, thanking God that none of these gapers in the street could see how his heart was beating inside his good sober clothes. Its beat was as rapid and irregular as a nervous youth’s. Through tall glass doors he walked into a large and completely

white entrance hall: high white walls around him; wide stone floor beneath him; and, sweeping down towards him, a broad stone staircase. No one in this white emptiness except the girl receptionist at her desk, with her switchboard beside her. But through the bare white walls came the din and clatter and purr of machines, working as regularly and rhythmically as the beating of his own heart. Sometimes the din was torn by a scream—the scream of a circular saw cutting through metal. Unending this rhythmic purr and clangor; frequent that rasping metallic shriek; the machines worked on and on, automatically, without halt or hurry, like the wheels of Time, taking no cognizance of him and his dreams.

He announced himself to the girl, and she turned to her switchboard and spoke into the heart of the shaken and reverberating building. ‘Mr. Herriot to see Mr. Salvesen. What? All right . . . Just one minute, sir . . . Yes? Okay . . . Mr. Salvesen’s secretary is coming down at once, sir.’

‘His secretary, did you say?’

‘Yes.’

‘Thank you.’ And he stood, heart trembling, eyes on those broad white stairs sweeping down from their first bend.

Steps on unseen stairs high above. Tapping steps as of high-heeled shoes on stone. Quick, almost merry, steps, like those of a child. Why, she had skipped down the first stair or two! Were these the steps of someone coming into his life? Even into his bed? If this dream of his should come to pass, then to what unimagined future was she coming so happily; to what destiny descending the stairs?

The steps were quieter now, and slower. No doubt she was donning dignity as she approached an important visitor in the hall. Here she was—she had come round the bend of the staircase and was wearing a welcoming smile for him as she came down the last steps.

His heart was wounded by her beauty; it shook beneath the pain of it. That hair of contrasting hues, light brown with gold and flaxen streaks, which used to hang down her back tied with a yellow bow, was now plaited into two plaits and coiled like a coronet round her head. Her face was still the face of the child in Hagen Street but the more seductive now, to him, because it held the consciousness of her womanhood and had known the admiration of men. He could not see that her face lacked strength of character, as old Mrs. Mickiewicz had said. Rather

did he see, somewhere about the red-painted mouth, hints of determination and will: polite she would always be in company, and charming to a stranger in a vestibule, but this was a mouth capable of being haughty and mocking.

Of her clothes he apprehended little except that she wore a suit of royal blue and a blouse of yellow, and that these colours of blue and yellow were the clearer for the whiteness of stair and wall. As she came towards him, he told himself that he would have her; if with his wealth and his scheming he could do it, he would have her; his heart cried for her as it had done that day when Berl led her, weeping, towards their door, and he had watched her from the level of the pavement; he wanted her savagely and cruelly; and very tenderly, almost pityingly, too.

He, in his turn, put out a smile to greet her.

'Mr. Herriot? It is Mr. Herriett, isn't it?' He could not doubt that she was looking up at him with interest because he was so famous a man in his own world. She had not the skill to hide the look, and it almost revealed her thought, 'This is the great Martin Herriot, and I am actually talking to him.' How different this wonder-look from the last look she had given him—the amused, grinning, pitying look! 'Mr. Salvesen is ready to see you. May I take you up?' Her head went to one side as she asked this, and her smile was ingratiating; and he knew that he was speaking to one who would be compelled always, and almost innocently, to put forth all her sex attraction in the presence of any man who was not yet a hundred. 'Will you come this way?'

Acting his part well, he did not answer; he just stood still and stared at her; then said at last, 'But . . . but surely you are Helga Lindgren?'

Now it was she who stared. Her eyebrows lifted; her lips parted. 'Yes . . . I am Helga Lindgren.'

'But we have met before.'

'I don't think so. When?'

'Years and years ago. I met you once when you came to Berl Mickiewicz's house.' This was not true, as we know; and at that instant, aptly enough and most abruptly, all the machinery in the great building stopped. It was just three o'clock and the workers were entitled to an interval for tea; but it sounded, this total silence, as if the shocked machines had stopped to listen to his lie, and to any that might follow it. He smiled inwardly and

continued, ‘But you wouldn’t remember. You couldn’t have been more than thirteen.’

‘You know Berl?’ Her brows now frowned.

‘My dear, Berl and I were at school together, and, by the way it was *your* school. You and I are schoolfellows.’

‘Schoolfellows?’

‘Undoubtedly, you and Berl and I. For a time, when we’d long left school, I lived with Berl.’

‘*You* did?’

‘Yes; and didn’t you live in Hagen Street too?’

‘I do still.’ She said it with a trace of defiant pride, refusing to be ashamed of that little street.

‘And there I met you. You don’t remember?’

‘I do not.’

‘It was nine years ago. Berl let me live with him when we were both out of work. We were out of work together.’

‘*You* were?’ She swung a glance towards the girl at the reception desk, but there seemed no fear of her hearing them. The girl was typing at speed, sounding the little bell of her machine and dashing its carriage back to the starting place: completely inattentive to these amazing revelations. ‘*You* were out of work?’

‘Even so. Berl and I used to go searching for work together. Once we were even sandwichmen together, parading the gutters in the Mile End Road. And the other day I looked him up again. Indeed it’s due to him that I’m here. He spoke of the Marcus Press and of someone—why it’s all coming back to me! It was your father he was speaking of. He’s worked here for years, hasn’t he?’

‘Yes, my father works in the Composing Room here. But to think that you know Berl! *Dear* Berl! I love him.’

‘So do I.’

‘I have always loved him. Ever since I was a child. He’s one of the nicest boys anywhere, and his old father and mother are darlings. But what a wretched deal he’s always had! I’ve sometimes felt ashamed to be so lucky when he’s had no luck at all. It’s all so senseless, because he’s so clever. He’s a thousand times cleverer than I am. There’s nothing he hasn’t read. He’s worth something infinitely better than that rotten waiter’s job.’

‘You needn’t worry any more about Berl, my dear. He’s coming to work with me. He’s going to have a job in my galleries that’s worthy of him. You know the Omar Galleries,

do you? No? Well, they're large and, I must confess, rather pretentious and showy; and you should have just seen old Berl's face when he saw them for the first time a few days ago. I'd let him imagine I had a poky little picture shop somewhere, and when he saw these palatial chambers, he went quite pale. And when I told him he was going to be one of my salesmen he was like the man in the Bible and "sat down astonished". I gave him a gilded chair to sit on and, like some other man in the Bible, he was 'astonished for an hour'. You'd never believe the amount of Bible stuff they pushed into me at school.'

'I think I should be astonished,' she laughed. 'And did Berl accept your offer?'

'I didn't argue about that. I just informed him of his job. It's my hope he'll be my chief salesman one day, and perhaps my manager. You see: we were out of work together; and now we're going to be in work together.'

'Oh, but that's fine of you! Oh, I *am* glad about it. What a thrill for his dear old father and mother. I must go and see them tonight. And congratulate them.'

'I see no reason why he shouldn't make good money at it. He was a brilliant boy at school, able to learn anything and after all——' here he smiled into her eyes—'he's a Jew of the Jews, and one of his race can sell anything to anybody—isn't that so? He'll get a basic salary of ten pounds a week, and——'

'Ten pounds a week!'

'Yes, but that's nothing. He'll sell on commission and I've known a good salesman in boom conditions to make as much as fifteen hundred or two thousand a year, or even more.'

'No!'

'Oh, yes—yes, certainly, Helga—but of course he wouldn't average anything like that. Still it'll be better than three pounds a week as a waiter.'

'But it's wonderful! I *am* so happy about it!' Clasping her hands before her breast, she did a small up-and-down hop on her toes: and in that happy movement he saw again the excited child in Hagen Street. 'Everybody loves Berl, and Mr. and Mrs. Mickiewicz. Now will you come up?'

He followed her up the wide stairway, looking at her slight graceful figure whose movements were now beautiful because she was conscious of beauty; and he was thinking, 'I have chosen. You are all I want, ever. And you're going to be mine, I know it. I've succeeded in everything I've attempted

so far, and I'm going to succeed in this. I don't fail. I'm going to have you, out of all the world. And quickly, quickly, my beloved, before any other man can touch you—while you are still virgin, my dear and lovely one. Yes, sweetheart, you laughed at me once, and now you shall come to me when I whistle to you. But then I'll give you everything, everything. I want to have you to love. I want to love you and you only . . .'

They had ascended a dozen steps in silence, and then he said aloud, 'You must come and see us both at work in the Omar Galleries. You must get Berl to bring you along one day.'

She half-turned on the stair and exclaimed, 'Oh, but I'd love to. I should love it above all things.'

And he thought, 'Yes, I think you will come, my darling. You will come when I call;' and, as he followed her, his body seemed emptied of all but trembling desire and hopes that out-raced belief.

§

Quickly, he had said; and he worked quickly. It was not two weeks later when, at seven in the evening, Berl and Helga, dressed for a dinner engagement, ascended the well-carpeted stairs to Martin's top-floor flat in Park Gate Terrace. They had come to the Omar Galleries a few days before, and there Martin had said to Berl, 'You must bring her to dinner with me one day, Berl old boy. It'll only be a bachelor's dinner party, I'm afraid, but the excellent couple who look after me will see to it that you don't have too bad a meal. I've taught them both how to cook.' To which Helga had replied, 'Oh, I should love it above all things;' and now she came up his stairs in her best frock of black artificial silk shot with metallic threads of gold; hatless, but with a white coat of imitation fur hung like a cloak around her. Berl did not match with her well. Having no dark suit except his crumpled waiter's *tenue*, he wore his rather shocking suit of Mediterranean blue.

Together they came to the door of the top flat and Berl rang the bell. As they waited for the door to open, Helga said, 'Oh, but I'm frightened! Don't you think he's a rather extraordinary personality? I quite went to pieces when he first looked at me and said nothing. And I thought he must be a witch or a warlock or something when he said, "You are Helga Lindgren." Oh, dear me, it's all rather disturbing. Aren't *you* frightened

of him?' And Berl said, Good lord no, he could feel no fears of Martin Herriot, because he could remember him as a little terrified boy who was bullied at school; and then the door opened.

It was opened by a short man with legs slightly bowed, back slightly rounded, face much creased and shrewd little eyes, shining between half-closed lids.

'Aye,' he said, when the eyes had scanned them. 'Aye, coom in. Martin's expectin' you. He's no but just nah coom in, but he's here. Coom in, lass, and put tha coat in spare room. T'missus'll look ah'ter you if you want owt. You, lad, coom on—yon's Martin's dressin' room, if you want to tidy yerseln. And theer's a place in theer if you're mucky and want a bit of a wash. Or owt else in that line. Ee, but here's Martin hisseln.'

Martin had appeared through a door to greet them. 'Here you are! Welcome. Wait; don't disappear, Helga. You must meet my very good friend, Daniel Leakin, who looks after me like a father with some able assistance from his wife. As I expect you inferred, he cooms fra Yorksheer. He puts on his broadest Yorkshire brogue with all strangers till he's sure they're trustworthy. It's a kind of insurance. Evidently he is not quite happy about you yet. Daniel, this is Miss Hclga Lindgren, my newest friend, and this is Berl, my very, very old friend.'

'Pleased to meet you, Ah'm sure. Ony friends o' Martin's are my friends. How d'you do, Berl? How do you do, Helga? But you mun excuse me nah, because Ah got to go and help wi' meal. Ah expect you're hungry, and Ah know Martin mun be fair clemmed; he's eaten nowt all day. Coom to that, Ah could do wi' a bite meseln.'

'That's right, Daniel,' said Martin, laying a hand on his shoulder. 'You go and help Maisie.'

'Ah'd better! Ah'd just better! Wi' women tha got .o be careful. If Ah doan't go an' gi' her a proper lift, she'll fair comb ma coat dahn for me; there'll be a fair takin'-on! It's no but a couple o' years since she and me were spliced, and Ah ain't got her tamed yet.'

'Well, go and tame her,' laughed Martin, 'and I'll look after our friends.'

'Ah wouldn't say but what she's got me tamed,' deplored Daniel, as he disappeared into the kitchen at the end of the passage.

'He's your servant, is he?' asked Berl.

'Not my servant; my friend,' corrected Martin.

'Oh, I see,' said Berl; and did not see.

So Martin explained. 'He used to be one of the orderlies at a certain Salvation Army Hostel in the Mile End Road that you probably know something about. He's an old scoundrelly fellow, and he wormed himself into the job when he was unemployed—There's your room, Helga dear: we'll wait for you—and he managed to stay in the job, preaching and praying, till they discovered that his piety was not quite up to standard. I think the Officer-in-charge caught him gambling with his guests, or perhaps giving one of them a free meal on the house. He gave me a free meal once. He's got a heart hidden somewhere, and he was very decent to me, when I was one of the house's guests: he gave me a filthy overcoat. Or let me say, he let me have it on hire, because I paid him back for it about eight years afterwards. I went to look the old boy up, and found him in Scrope Street, Stepney, out of work again. He'd been cast forth from his temporary heaven into the outer darkness, where he was living on his new wife—who's more than twenty years younger than he is, and much too good for him. I'll tell you all about her later. This is what I call the drawing room. Sit down and make yourself comfortable. I suggested that they came and looked after me, not as servants but as good friends; they came willingly, and here they've been ever since. Nothing could be better: we all love each other dearly.'

He sat down opposite Berl. 'I like having my old out-of-work pals about me. You and I and Daniel were all out of work together and now we're all in the same work together. Fine. Ah, here's our Helga. Come, my dear.'

They were large rooms in these great park-side mansions, now converted into flats. This great house, 17 Park Gate Terrace, had been the home of a famous statesman in Victorian days, and it seemed incredible now that these large rooms on the top floor had been merely the upper bedrooms. They were longer and larger than some of the rooms in the Omar Galleries and they served as well to set off some of Martin's treasures. Here in his drawing room were some of those fine things for which there was no place in the galleries: sculptures, bronzes, Sèvres vases, pieces of the French furniture which he so loved, and of course 'a few fine pictures' on the light gold damask of the walls.

He went to a chest surmounted by a cabinet, the whole

veneered, like the secretaire in his office, with tulip wood and purple wood, and opening the cabinet drew forth a sherry decanter and glasses. He poured out sherry for them, and then led them round his treasured pieces, one after another. He wanted Helga to see all these beautiful things, to wonder at their value—had he not once been ashamed at the thought of inviting her into his home?—but he spoke of them with modesty. ‘They’re really only remnants from my old Earle Street shop and stockroom, where I sold more of this sort of stuff than of pictures, and they’re only housed here till Berl can sell them at some wicked price to some wealthy unfortunate.’

Helga expressed a fervid and exclamatory admiration over each exhibit, an admiration which, if effusive, was not hypocritical; she did think everything wonderful, and some of it (though she would not show this) rather frightened her. When he had shown them everything in his sitting rooms, he said, ‘Now there’s one other thing I want to show Helga especially. It should have a certain interest for her, though it will show me up in a very stupid light, I’m afraid. It’ll involve a confession of what a very absurd young man I was, many years ago. Come this way. Come and see Admiral Rattibon’s daughter.’

He led them across the passage into his bedroom. And here on the wall, facing the foot of the bed, hung a great picture in a heavy, ornate, gilt frame. Martin lifted a hand towards it and smiled. ‘What do you say to that?’ he asked.

All three stood looking up at it.

It was the life-size picture of a child seated on what appeared to be the steps of a Roman temple, for two fluted columns rose from their bases behind her. It must have been the corner of the stylobate because you could see, between the pillars and behind the child, a sky of brown, thunderous darkness. Dimly in the stormy landscape stood the shadow of a great tree. The child, though not more than twelve-years-old, wore a low-necked, ankle-length Empire frock of white silk. Her hair, golden brown, was drawn tightly back from the brow and bound about her head with a white ribbon. It was an idealized portrait: the childish eyes were bluer than the morning sky; the features were too perfectly regular; and the skin of round face and uncovered throat bettered the pink of porcelain.

‘What do you think of her?’ repeated Martin. ‘She’s lost in a day-dream, isn’t she, sitting alone on her step?’

‘A very lovely child,’ said Berl, and he dropped his eyes to

the name-plate at the foot of the frame. It said 'The Daughter of Admiral Rattibon. Sir Thomas Lawrence, 1760-1830.'

'And what do you say, Helga?'

'Oh, it's beautiful,' she answered, though to her the child in that grown-up dress looked quaint and unnatural. She looked as if she had just come into a temple garden by night after playing at 'dressing up'. 'It's a Lawrence, I see. A real Lawrence!' And Martin saw that she was pretending to know all about this painter, whose name she barely knew. 'I suppose it's terribly valuable.'

'No. Lawrences don't fetch the big prices any more. I didn't buy it for that reason. I bought it simply and solely for the sake of the divine child in the picture. Do you see anything special about her, Berl?'

'The only thing that I'm thinking,' said Berl with a laugh, as if what he was about to say couldn't be what Martin was expecting, 'is that she's rather like Helga.'

'Oh, no!' Helga protested, though not displeased.

'Rather like? Why, she's *exactly* like,' declared Martin. 'It's Helga's face exactly. Let loose the hair, tie it with a yellow bow, and put her into a brown school tunic, and there's our Helga sitting on her doorstep ten years ago.'

Helga blushed and exclaimed 'Nonsense!' and looked embarrassed, so Martin put his fingers gently on her arm, to comfort her. 'No doubt you think I'm rather mad, my dear, but I bought it for that reason, and that reason only, six, seven years ago, when I first had some money. I may as well tell you the truth. I used to watch you from my window when I lived with Berl and, quite frankly, I fell in love with you. I thought you were the most beautiful child I had ever seen. Berl will tell you I used to say this.'

'Yes, I remember, Helga. He did. It's true.'

'But did I sit on my doorstep? Yes, I believe I used to.'

'You sat there or on the kerb, and you never knew how beautiful you looked—which added to the beauty. No doubt you were not quite as beautiful as I thought,' he said with a smile, teasing her, 'but you seemed so to me, because I was out of work and hopeless and very miserable. You were only an excitable little schoolgirl, but you seemed like the symbol of some beauty which could never be mine, and because of this, there were times when, in my despair, I was quite eager to make an end of myself. I went from Hagen Street just because I

could no longer bear the sight of you, but I never forgot you as a picture—and when, years later, I saw Admiral Rattibon's daughter, well, I bought it at once for the sake of a memory.'

He looked at her, smiling. She was obviously torn between pleasure and embarrassment, the pleasure shining in her eyes but the discomfort flooding her cheeks and disabling her lips, so that she could say nothing in reply. Somewhat weakly he asked, 'You don't mind my telling you this, do you?'

'No, of course not!' For his relief she put, most deliberately, a further brightness into her eyes. 'I think it's a rather lovely thing to have happened. It was rather sweet of you. And to think that I never knew anything about it! But I'm sure I was never as beautiful as that.'

'Tell her she was, Berl—though it's not really necessary any more: she knows it now.' He turned his eyes back to the picture. 'Heigh-ho, but I wonder what hapened to the admiral's little daughter. What did her beauty bring her? Love in full measure I suppose; pressed down and flowing over. But was she happy in life, and sweet always, or did she turn old and harsh and grim before she died? A sour-faced old woman?'

'Oh, don't!' pleaded Helga suddenly.

He only smiled. 'But what does it all matter this evening, as we stand looking at her. She's been dead and dust for a long time now. It's just rather sad—that's all—sad. She was too sweet a blossom to wither on her bough.'

'Oh, don't!' begged Helga again. 'Life can seem so awful sometimes.'

Daniel Deakin appeared in the doorway as she spoke, and didn't wait for her to finish. 'Yer dinner's oop, lad,' he said.

'All right, Daniel. We'll come.'

'Aye, but doan't stand hangin' abaht in here and lettin' it aw' get cauld.'

'We won't. We'll behave ourselves, Daniel.'

'Eh, weel, Ah hope so, but Ah'm noan so sure ye will. Ah know ye of owd. Ony road, theer's t'meal in dinin' room.'

As they walked from bedroom to dining room, Daniel having preceded them, Martin said, 'Old Daniel's Yorkshire's at it's very broadest tonight, and I now think it's a compliment to your way of speaking, and to our Helga's.'

'What on earth do you mean?' inquired Berl.

'I mean that old Daniel could speak a far more Christian English if he liked, but he talks this broad Yorkshire stuff when he's determined to show that he's above all class distinctions. The more refined he considers my speech, and the speech of my guests, the broader his accent becomes. You see, Daniel and I have risen a little way in the world, and the higher we go the more pleased he is, but the less he's going to show it. In fact—as I tell him—the higher we go, the broader. If we get much higher he'll become unintelligible. Helga, dear, you mustn't mind if he's a little brusque with you. He's rather inclined to mistake bad manners for good independence.'

'I think he's perfectly sweet,' said Helga.

'Do you? Well, for mercy's sake, don't let him know that you think so, or he really will become unintelligible. Berl, your chair. Helga, my guest of honour, sit here.'

They took their places at a table beautifully dressed. It was a five-course dinner, carefully designed by Martin, and well served by Daniel, with some assistance from Maisie, his wife. Martin knew that he had designed it all to impress Helga with his taste and wealth, but his talk, full of modesty and of frankness about his poverty-stricken past, successfully veiled this. So did his refusal—and this was genuine; it was even deeply felt—to be in any way the social superior of Daniel and Mrs. Deakin. 'At one time,' he told them, when Daniel was out of the room, 'Daniel and Maisie and I used to have our meals together as good friends, but I soon saw that they'd be happier by themselves in their kitchen. Old Daniel wasn't at all comfortable, sitting at this table: he declared that it was all too swanky for him, and he no longer liked to sweep up his gravy with a hunk of bread or wipe his mouth on his sleeve. So it's only on Christmas night and other festal occasions that we all sit down together. I wanted them to regard this as a feast tonight and to come and sit with you, but they wouldn't have it.'

'Oh, what a pity!' said Helga and repeated that she thought Mr. Deakin sweet.

'Sweet? I should have called him rather tart! And a scheming rogue too; but who isn't, who isn't? Berl isn't, perhaps; but who else? Helga? No, I don't feel at all confident about our Helga.' That she might know this for banter he gently put his hand over hers on the table.

'Daniel's chief occupation in life has been looking after himself, but since mine is much the same—and Helga's too,

I'm sure—eh, my dear?—we neither of us feel disposed to think the worse of him for that.

'No, of course not, Mr. Herriot,' said Helga, anxious to please a host of whom she was still a little afraid, by agreeing with him in everything.

'And now have done with calling me Mr. Herriot. My name is Martin.'

'You were going to tell us about Mrs. Deakin,' Berl reminded him.

'Yes, and Maisie Deakin is a perfect example of how Daniel looks after Number One. As you see, she's comely and young and obviously less rough in the rind than Daniel—which, of course, may be another reason for the strength and breadth of his Yorkshire brogue, when anyone's likely to see her. She was the widow of a young plasterer with whom she led a miserable life for about three years. He was a great hulking fellow, and knocked her about, till he himself was knocked down and killed by a railway lorry in the East India Dock Road. This was possibly a relief to Maisie, but, if so, she didn't show it. Instead she spoke of damages. The Railway and the Insurance Company, of course, promptly denied all liability and Maisie, as she told me, was "livid with them". She got hold of a "poor man's lawyer", who immediately threatened to sue everybody within reach, whereupon they offered an *ex gratia* payment of two hundred and fifty pounds. The lawyer refused this and advised them that he could bring evidence of negligence on the driver's part (I doubt if he could have done), that Maisie's husband and bread-winner was only twenty-two with fifty years expectation of life, and that, furthermore, Maisie's "deprivation of happiness" had to be considered. He made no mention of the fact that she and the plasterer had never ceased quarrelling since the night of their wedding. In the end they settled for five hundred pounds which was probably five hundred less than Maisie expected and two hundred more than the lawyer foresaw. Maisie was twenty five then and attractive and buxom, and she had this most attractive and buxom egg in her basket, so Daniel dashed in and collected both. How he managed it, I don't know, since he was more than twenty years older than she and far from beautiful. Perhaps she was tired of young men, or perhaps it's just that we shall never understand why some women marry some men. I don't think she's ever regretted

the marriage—he's a likeable old thing and a merry companion, and even a fond husband, though he'd probably repudiate anything so "soft". I understand she said she would marry him if he promised not to beat her, and I'm sure he promised very readily. He accepts any creed if there's money in it. Anyhow, they seem happy enough now, living with me.'

'I'm sure they are; they *must* be,' declared Helga.

'He waits very nicely,' said Berl, laughing, 'and remember, I ought to know what good waiting is. I've given ten years of my life to that art and mystery.'

'He enjoys waiting. I think he rather fancies his skill at it. He first got a taste for it, I imagine, at the Salvation Army Hostel. His only fault is that he joins in the dinner-table talk and argues with the guests as he's filling their glasses—which surprises them sometimes. I suppose he does it to remind them that he's in no way beneath them, even if he is taking their plates. Do you know the Salvation Army Hostel in the Mile End Road, Helga? Have a look at it next time you pass by and think that once upon a time it was our hotel. I don't think Berl ever patronized it, because he never took to the road like me, but I was a frequent guest there, and Daniel—well, he was one of its chambermaids.'

Their tongues, his and Berl's, were now loosed by the sherry and the Clos de Vougeot and the Château d'Yquem with which Daniel had plied their glasses, and they described with laughter, for Helga's entertainment, those old dead, desperate days. Daniel, whenever he was in the room, joined in the chatter and laughter, as he laid or removed their plates. He said, 'Eh, but Ah wur a daft fool' when Martin reported some gaffe of his, and 'Nay, but Ah'll have to work that one owt. Ah'm sayin' nowt at moment,' when he saw that Martin was making fun of him but was not quite clear where the fun lay. Once or twice when he thought Martin's banter was going a bit too far, he said, 'Aw, howd thy gab, Martin,' or even 'Ah, t'hell wi' thy gab!' To Helga, offering her a further portion of the sweet, he said, 'Will tha' tak s'more, Helga?' and as Martin just then was telling a tale of a Twopenny Hangover in Gotham Street, he endorsed it, lest she supposed he was lying, 'Aye, it's all true, luv.' As he went out with a tray he yelled for Maisie, 'Hey, lass! Open door.' All this time Helga, more confused by the wine than she would want them to know, was listening in astonishment to Martin's tales of workhouse, night shelter, and Twopenny Hangover, and fixing her eyes on him.

'Berl will tell you what I looked like as a tramp. I had a beard like a poodle's, and my hair almost reached my shoulders, and my clothes were mostly too long or too short because they were other people's cast-off clouts. I remember people used to turn round and look back at me. Sometimes they stared at me as I went by and grinned. Perhaps *you* did once, in Hagen Street. Who knows?'

Berl told tales of his days on the dole, and together they bantered Helga as one who had been living in luxurious comfort when they were 'skint' and 'on the rory'. She ridiculed this, laughingly, and was happy in the talk, and beyond measure interested in it—fascinated by it, so that she gazed and gazed at her host who was so well dressed, spoke so quietly, and showed such courtesy to all, and yet had this sombre background behind him.

When, at the evening's close, she and Berl must go, Martin said, 'Helga's going to take back with her some little souvenir of this evening. I insist upon it. Now come, my dear.' He took her to a satinwood breakfront bookcase, the largest piece of furniture in the room. Its shelves behind the great glass doors held no books but a show of china and porcelain, including some Meissen *Commedia dell'arte* figures by Kaendler, Reinicker, and Eberlein. Quaint and charming figures they were, in their shining colours. Here were the Capitano, with his long nose and fierce, curled moustaches; the old Dottore in black cap and gown; Pantalone with his grey beard and long pantaloons; and Flavio the Lover with Isabella the Beloved; and, of course, Arlecchino and his Colombina. This was his favourite collection, he said; and he explained all these merry buffoons to her: the doctor, pedantic and vain; the Captain, a swaggering braggart; Pantaloon, the everlasting tedious old fool; and lastly poor, sad Harlequin in his black mask, ever a schemer and all too often a blunderer.

'Now one of these you're going to have for yourself to decorate your new room in Thurloe Gardens. Which is it to be?'

'Oh, no!' she said. 'I couldn't take one of those from you. They must be terribly valuable.'

'Rubbish. You will just be taking something out of stock. It's not at all unusual, is it, Berl, to give a visitor a little something from the firm's wares. Look: I'll choose for you. I want you to have the best. Here——' he pulled open the glass doors and drew forth a little brightly coloured group of Harlequin

and Columbine. ‘That I always think is the most charming piece of all. Take it. No, don’t talk; go and get your cloak. I shall like to think of it in your new room. Perhaps it’ll sometimes remind you of our first meeting. I’m sure I was a kind of Harlequin then, in my rags and patches, and you were Columbine, jumping and skipping and screaming to heaven on your pavement. You didn’t see me, or know how much I was loving you, but that was as it should be. Harlequin in his chequered suit and black mask was always supposed to be invisible. Not another word, my dear. It is yours.’

§

That night Helga Lindgren went back to Hagen Street with her thoughts doing a disorderly dance in a bright haze and, as she told Martin long afterwards, her ‘whole Being shaken’. Her parents were in bed, and she hurried past their door into her own bedroom and there wandered up and down it, and round about it, smoking cigarette after cigarette, till it was one and two in the morning. That picture in his room, hanging where he could see it on waking! Admiral Rattibon’s daughter—‘the divine child in the picture,’ he had called her! ‘I thought you the most beautiful child I had ever seen,’ he had said, and ‘Quite frankly, I was in love with you.’ Harlequin. Columbine. ‘You were Columbine and you didn’t know how much I was loving you.’ Was he—was he half in love with her again? How could one think otherwise? His tender courtesy with her; his gentle touching of her arm or hand; his affectionate teasing of her with Berl. And that visit to the Printing Works. ‘Did you tell him I was the Chief’s secretary?’ she had asked Berl on the way home; and Berl had said, ‘Of course I did.’ But Martin had pretended a surprise when he saw her there. Had he perhaps come to look at her, and acted a lie? If so, how willingly she forgave the lie. That present on parting: the best piece, he had said, in the collection he loved best. Not a word in the next days did she say to her parents about his gift; she kept it hidden in a drawer; why, she hardly knew. But she longed to get to Thurloe Gardens that she might set it upon her mantelshelf for all to see, and for herself to contemplate. And all these next days she went about her work, or halted in it, with her eyes bemused and stilled. A week later she was in her new room at the Ladies’ Residential Club in Thurloe Gardens,

and the Harlequin and Columbine stood alone on the mantelpiece, as if no other company were worthy of them.

§

I have often wondered how far Byron was right when he pronounced that ‘love is woman’s whole existence’. I can’t help feeling that even Cleopatra was probably thinking of other things for some six or seven-tenths of the day. But whether his words are true of Everywoman’s love, I think they might have been applied with some aptness—though perhaps you ladies will correct me—to Helga’s beauty; it was almost bound to be, to a certain extent, ‘her whole existence.’ She might pretend to be unaware of it, or dubious about it, but I suspect she was conscious of it most of the day. Else why did she glance into every mirror she passed and into every shop-window that would oblige with a reflection? Martin used to tell me that he never looked at a picture of ‘The Toilet of Venus’ without thinking of Helga glancing at any surface that would reflect her face. Her beauty must have sat enthroned in her head, with dreams for its courtiers. Dreäins of what it might win for her. Berl had not erred when he said that she would yield it up only to one who came with a big price. As he had told Martin, many a foolish lad, many a self-satisfied and arrogant man, had hinted to her of ultimate favours only to be laughed at for their foolishness or mocked for their comical complacency, or perhaps sent into an uncomfortable exile with a few barbed words to fester like thorns in their memory.

But *he*? Martin. How far did *he* fill up the shadowy role she had created in dreams? He was handsome indeed. A little too short, perhaps, but what features! And what eyes! Eyes that were now mischievous and teasing, now remote and sad, now dark and rather frightening. He had great wealth. Berl had said that a hundred thousand wouldn’t begin to cover his fortune. And she admired this in him, not chiefly because a reputation for great wealth will always stir interest and, willy-nilly, respect in us vulgar men—this manner of admiration was bound to be present in the child from Hagen Street—but because she found admirable the fact that the world had set about to defeat him in his youth and he had turned upon the tyrant and defeated it. And his frankness about those destitute days—she admired this too. The knowledge that he was sprung from

a class no better than her own was a weight in his favour because she could still be nervous with people of rank and riches when she remembered that child in Hagen Street. She might be at a disadvantage, she thought, and ill-at-ease with some lover whose childhood had been spent in a wealthy home and whose relatives (especially the female ones) were fashionable and rich. But with one like Martin, she could always remember that it was the same pit from which they were come.

If then, he really was in love with her, and should ask for her love in return, would she give it?

Yes, oh yes. . . .

§

Thus Helga Lindgren, despite all the store of beauty she carried to market, and despite her reputation for not a little self-esteem and a quick disdain, was Martin Herriot's at his first call. She did indeed 'come at his whistle'. Only two more meetings—he had insisted jokingly on seeing her new room and the Residential Ladies, and he had taken her once to a dinner and a theatre—but they were enough: he knew that she was in love with him. And what to him was just as delightful, he knew that his love for her was very real—as he wanted it to be for his own happiness' sake. He loved her for falling in love with him instantaneously, she who could surely have won any man. Indeed he was secretly astonished that he had captured her so easily because, no matter how great his success in the world, there were times when he could still not quite believe in himself; times when he was remembering too clearly the timid child in Omar Square and the backward boy at school. At such times he would have to abandon his joyous thoughts of Helga while he sought excuses for that backwardness at the St. Mary Lane School and his appalling failure at the Art School.

The more he looked upon Helga's beauty, the more his desire mounted, and the more he felt that the moment when he took and enjoyed that beauty would be the greatest moment in his life—but one thing hindered the coming of this tremendous hour. Did he ask her to marry him, she would come straight into his arms: of this he was sure. But this was not what he wanted. He wanted her to come, not in the commonplace way of marriage but in a complete surrender to him as his mistress. This bold

ambition was now a deeply rooting desire. And why? Because in his enmity with the world he was resolved, if possible, not to do what it would try to enforce upon him. He would not do what the world dubbed good. He would do what he himself chose to do. And he, the great Martin Herriot, was not going to tie himself, at the world's command, to anyone. He would teach Helga that this tyrannical ordinance of the world was *not* good—or it was good only for slaves. In this matter she must be at one with him in contempt of the world.

This need to have her without marriage had now the same colour as his need to force the world to yield him wealth.

Would it be so difficult to get her thus? Clearly the enraptured child could not keep away from him but that did not mean that she would come thus far. Not yet. And not yet would he frighten her with any such idea. Why, so careful his approach, he had not yet even kissed her.

Oh, he moved with care. He played her with an angler's skill. First he persuaded her to come into his business—but only as one of several girl-secretaries and only at a salary a pound or so more than the one she was already receiving. Since she was now in Thurloe Gardens, he was able, unseen of her parents, to take her often out to dinner, but not too often—he did not do this too often. Nor did he frighten her with gifts too lavish. Occasionally he left her for a long time without any of these attentions, and even treated her coldly, because he knew that this would start miserable doubts in her and heighten her love. And when he did again show kindness to her, he saw that the old trick had worked as surely as it always did: she was sick with love for him.

On one such occasion, after a fortnight of this careful incubation by neglect, he took her to a dinner-and-dance at a country club, and as they sat at table or danced, he saw that the poor child was searching his eyes for proof of his love and in a dozen ways proffering hers to him. She was now a beggar on his bounty, and he could pity her for it. But he could also take the next step. So after they had danced for an hour or two, he suggested that he should drive her back to his flat and show her a new set of English porcelain which he had acquired: beautiful pieces from Worcester and Derby, Bristol and Chelsea and Bow.

'Come,' he said, picking up her hand.

Of course she came. He drove her home, not too fast, so that

it was approaching midnight when they reached his flat. There she stood before the pieces and, to please him, poured out her delight in them, but while she was yet speaking, he sighed and said, ‘Well, it is late, I suppose,’ and gently guided her towards the door. He spoke almost as if he were tired and wished her to go; and then she in a kind of despair, when they were beyond the door and about to part, most unmistakeably offered her face to him. She almost pleaded with him to kiss her. So lovely she seemed in the dim-lit passage beyond the door, and so sweet was this longing for him, that his kiss and his embrace of her body was quite the greatest pleasure that he, Martin Herriot, he the scared child in Auntie Vera’s kitchen, he the tramp in the Hangover, had ever touched in life. He kissed her only gently at first, but she, in this hour of helpless surrender, pressed lips and body upon him; and then he responded with a like passion and a greater passion.

When they broke apart he held her by the shoulders in front of him and said smilingly, but gently and humbly, ‘My dear, I love you. You must long have known that. Please, may I love you?’

She did not answer, except with the happy radiance in her eyes.

‘And please—Helga, you perfect thing—can you love me? I do beg of you to, if you can.’

‘I do. I do,’ she whispered, staring up at him with something like fear in her eyes, lest her exultation were not real, or could not last, or would be snatched from her. ‘I have from the very first, I think.’

Laughingly, still holding her by the shoulders and looking down into her face, he said, ‘God, you are beautiful! And you are mine. Every bit of you is mine.’

She nodded her assen., smiling. ‘Oh yes . . . yes.’

‘And there’s no one else in sight; no one you love? No horrible man?’

‘No, no.’

‘But how is that? I should have thought all the world was at your door. It’s not fair to be so beautiful, my dear. How can any man resist you?’

‘There have been others,’ she said proudly, ‘but I didn’t care for any of them.’

‘And you care for me?’

‘How can you ask?’

' You want no one but me? '
Her answer was a shake of her head.
' Say it,' he commanded.
' I want no one but you.'
' And you never will? '
' No.'

' You never must. No one else ever. I could not bear it. Understand, darling: if there's ever anyone else; if he dares so much as to touch you, I shall kill him.'

It was but a merry word, for he believed as he spoke that she was his captive for ever and he need fear none.

§

Thereafter they were lovers confessed—but confessed to one another and to none else. No talk of marriage as yet nor, be sure, of anything other than marriage. To Helga it was as customary an affair as those she'd seen in Hagen Street where a young man and a girl would 'walk out', for years sometimes, before they spoke of an engagement. She remained in her room at the Residential Club; she remained as a secretary in the Galleries; but they went out together: to dinners and theatres in winter; to green country places in the warm summer; and were very happy.

She would have loved to tell her parents all about it, but, learning that he did not wish her to do so, she dared not. His power over her was great. You see, his astounding success in the world had given him a sense of power; and a sense of power is power. And Helga had now so passionately given herself to this man of charm and power that she was always in fear of offending him and always—strange, unforeseen fear this!—dreading lest some other woman should take him from her. She who had dreamed so happily that her beauty would command anything, and that it was she who would keep the lovers dangling about her in healthy doubts and fears, now forgot all about that beauty and could only remember the child in Hagen Street.

It was that child who made her afraid to ask if one day they would be engaged and one day married.

At the first her hunger for him had been almost completely spiritual for her body was hardly awake. And though she had very fair abilities she was quite unsophisticated. Her home had been simple, pious, and puritan; and she, unintellectual

and caring little for books, had read nothing to disturb her simplicities.

In her *naïveté*, never imagining that he would be other than impressed, she would tell him, with pride, of the way she had treated 'idiotic' men who'd suggested to her—'well, you know what'; how she had laughed at this one because he was only a silly boy, but had shot her venom at another, saying thus and thus, because he was old enough to know better and his assumptions were insolence. Martin only smiled at these proud tales, and said nothing. He could wait. His watching eyes saw that her love for him was now like a daemon possessing her; it caused her to reproduce his words, his movements, his gestures. And he had felt her body awaken under his kisses. Now, sometimes, when in his embrace, she would force herself on him and wait, gazing up, and then tremble with an ecstatic anguish, and suddenly droop. He would not have to bide his time much more.

And he, oh he was happier than ever in his life because he was really, truly, deeply loving her. He might torture her a little, now and then, with those periods of neglect so as to make her love him more, and this treatment might afford him pleasure, but it was nothing like the joy he got from surrounding her with happiness. Sometimes he felt not less than intoxicated with delight that this most beautiful thing was his—she who could not enter a room but people must turn and stop their talk to look at her. Of course he longed and ached to enjoy that beauty, but the will in his mind was a stronger daemon than the desire in his body; it was the undisputed captain of his body; and its fiat now was that she should surrender on his terms.

§

So for some months he dealt with her very gently, and only when he was sure that she was his to do what he liked with did he judge it time to speak. Then one evening, after a quiet dinner, he took her home to his study in Park Gate Terrace. And there they sat together, he leaning back in his usual deep chair, and she in the deep chair opposite, with her legs drawn up under her skirt and an elbow on the chair's stout arm, and her chin on her hand.

He flung his hands behind his head and joined them there, as if in the mood to be merry. He fixed half-laughing eyes upon

her and for a long minute did not speak. She lifted her eyebrows as if inquiring why he was looking like that and what droll thing he was about to say.

And he said, ‘Tell me something, my dear and exasperatingly beautiful child—you always look exasperatingly beautiful when you arch your eyebrows like that—upon my soul, you are, beyond question, the most beautiful thing in the world, as I foretold you would be, when you were a screaming child of thirteen—tell me this, sweetheart, why do you never ask me if I’m going to marry you?’

‘Because I haven’t liked to,’ she laughed. And then laughed again. ‘Besides, isn’t it your business to ask me?’

‘I’ll ask you another question first. Do you believe in marriage?’

‘Why, of course!’ And her eyes showed that she could only suppose he was joking. She had never heard of anyone who questioned marriage. ‘Naturally I do.’

He must be gentle with her. ‘Would you be very shocked if I told you that I profoundly disbelieved in it? More, that I angrily disbelieved in it?’

‘*Disbelieve?*’

‘Yes.’

‘But how can one?’

‘Oh, very easily.’ And, still smiling tolerantly, he set before her the ancient arguments. Fully four hundred years ago the world—or at least the protestant part of it—had set thought free from the tyranny of the Church; some two hundred years later it had set it free from the tyranny of the State; and now no man need suffer any church or any state to say to him ‘This shall you believe, and no other.’

She didn’t understand what he was coming to, but she sat there, now leaning forward with her chin in both hands and gravely listening, because he was so wise, so learned, and so interesting.

And Martin went on. ‘And one day the world will have to set love free. It hasn’t done this yet in four hundred years. The Church still has the impudence to say, “This person shall you love for ever, and none other.” And the State is only a little more liberal. Well, dearest, for my part I am never asking from any state—and still less from any church—a licence to love.’

She looked frightened; her eyebrows drew towards each other in a frown of bewilderment; and to him this movement

of her brows in a momentary frustration was as lovely as her arching of them in amused inquiry. She mustn't imagine, he said, that he didn't believe in two people loving each other for ever. Not less than the Archbishop of Canterbury or the Pope of Rome did he believe that the ideal was one man and one woman bound in love to each other for ever (Martin was not lying when he said this); but he also believed that this ideal was more hindered than helped by making them vow to do so and putting fretful chains around them. They must forge their chains from within; and he'd seen this done hundreds of times by people who, technically, were not married at all. External chains prompted any man of spirit to break them. And again, would not a man continue to woo his woman carefully and considerately if he knew she was free to leave him for another at any time?

Still she did not speak.

'None of this seems right to you, I suppose?' he asked gently.

'I don't know . . . I don't know . . .' she said. 'In some ways it sounds rather wonderful.'

'Listen: I love you, my precious, and I know I shall never love anyone else. I never want to love anyone else. Very well, then: supposing I were to ask you to live with me like that, what would you say?'

'I don't know . . . I don't know . . .' She frowned over the problem. 'I don't think I should mind much, if it were not for what people would say.'

'They would say nothing if we told them nothing. The offence is, bless your heart,—not to do the thing—but to do it publicly. But, so far as I'm concerned, I care not what they say or don't say. And let me tell you this, my beloved; if you want to develop your full power, you must cease to be afraid of people's censure. Until you do this, you are bound in fetters, body, feet and hands. I know it; I know it only too well. I was a weak unhappy drifter till all of a sudden one day—it was down in a room in your Hagen Street—I refused to be constricted by anyone any more. Then I suddenly became a different person and conquered a whole world for myself. By God, that was an hour!' He rose up and stood before her. 'An hour of vision and decision. After it I . . .'

But there cautiously he left the subject. A seed must have its hours and days to work in the darkness before a green shoot appears above ground. He did not return to the subject at all,

but he did sometimes water and warm the seed by speaking of other women he knew, or had met, and of their beauty. I think that Faust, with Mephistopheles at his ear, did not handle his Gretchen better. At last, fearful of losing him, she offered herself to him. It was one night after a dinner together, during which she had been greatly abstracted, speaking little, and after a silence that may have been fifteen minutes long, that she said, the blood mounting her face, ‘There’s something I want to say to you, and don’t quite like to.’

‘Say on, my pet.’

‘Do you remember saying that two people ought to be free to love as they like?’

‘Did I say that? I have forgotten. But whether I did or not, it is certainly what I think.’

‘Well, I do understand what you meant. And——’ here she put her hand over his on the table—‘and I am ready to do anything you want. . . . Of course I am. . . .’

He took her home and had his way with her. And after they had merged and melted into one another, and she had so palpably drawn from him an ecstasy beyond anything she had known, his exultation and delight in her were so great that the love—a purely spiritual love now—pouring from him to her was a breathless inflation in breast and throat. And as he looked down upon her face and thought of her willing, her fervid, her even wild, surrender to him, it seemed a triumph as great, and much sweeter, than any of his triumphs in the material world. He was moved to repeat what he had said to her when he first exulted in her kiss; but with far greater emphasis he said it now. Not that he meant it, not that he fully knew what he was saying, but that in some such words only could he express his passionate delight in her; and he smiled as he said it. ‘My God, no one else is ever to have this! Before anyone else has this, Helga Lindgren, I will kill him. And possibly myself too, because I could not live without you. If you give your love to anyone else, he shall die and I shall die.’

She looked up at him, laughing too. ‘There’ll never be anyone else, my beloved. So there’ll be no need to kill anyone.’

‘There had better not be, you most exquisite thing. I couldn’t stand it.’ And looking down again upon that beauty which had just been his, he imagined it in the possession of another, and for a second the pain was almost as great as if this imagined thing were real. To realize that it was imagination

only was like waking from an intolerable nightmare and being at peace again.

§

This was the secret Herriot, working to his own private formulæ, slowly, steadfastly, even cosily, like a young mole below ground. But unlike a mole he cast up few traces behind him as he excavated his subterranean home. Meanwhile the public figure was growing ever larger in the world's eye. As his profits increased, almost by geometrical progression, so did his prestige and his position among the captains of the art-dealer's world. By this time he must have multiplied his initial investment by a hundred or more. I am only a geologist, with but a poor understanding of the human fauna above ground, and with no knowledge at all of the Big Game among them, which we call Big Business men, but, so far as I could understand what Martin Herriot told me on the mountains, his method was something like this: he would collect ten pictures of some up-and-coming painter at fairly cheap prices—say at a thousand pounds each; he would then buy another picture by that painter at some staggering price, a price to shake the market—say twenty thousand; he would see to it that this figure was well publicized, which was not at all difficult to achieve, since for some reason or another the sale of a picture at a big price is always 'News'; and as a result of this noisy purchase his original ten pictures appreciated to at least ten times what he'd paid for them; and thus, if my arithmetic is right, he had converted ten thousand pounds into a hundred thousand at the cost of twenty thousand.

I hope you follow.

Somewhere about this time he opened a gallery in Paris and a smaller establishment in New York. This American branch was a slow starter: his name was but little known over there and could not sit with the Knoedlers, the Wildensteins, and the Seligmans. But he kept the branch floating at the cost of many thousand dollars a year; till its big days began when the rumour of certain incidents at the mother gallery in London was carefully directed by his publicity department westward across the Atlantic.

I must tell you that the Omar Galleries were now almost limited to the sale of great pictures at great prices. If you went

in your eye was held by a series of framed pictures standing on easels, one behind the other in echelon formation, on the thick carpet as far as the eye could see; but there were still a few pieces of over-decorated French furniture, shyly offering themselves for sale against the red damask walls, like *filles de joie* in a foyer. And on and about them a few, a very few, objects of virtu. Martin's business motto, you see, was simple enough: it was this: 'The wider my reputation, the more and more I demand for less and less.' Well, one day a noble and eye-arresting Daimler limousine, as long as two ordinary cars, halted outside the galleries, and a royal lady stepped out and entered his shop—if so homely a word can be used of premises so stately. By good fortune he was in his office at the time—though this was not unusual: unless he was abroad in search of pictures he would be in his galleries from opening-time till close, because his heart was there and they were his love, his hobby, and his sole interest. The royal lady came *incognita*, but of course he recognized her at once. In his tact he veiled this recognition and addressed her only as 'Madam'. She was famous as a collector of old furniture, fine porcelain and statuary, and with a quiet courtesy he escorted her from piece to piece. But as he passed an office door, remembering with love Helga who sat within, knowing how she would be 'thrilled' to meet this lady, and desiring to give her everything his fame could win for her, he called her forth. 'Miss Lindgren, come and help me, will you, please.' And when she appeared, he said to the lady, 'This is Miss Lindgren, Madam, one of my most capable secretaries. Anything I don't know about any article or picture, its provenance or its history, she will certainly be able to tell you.'

'Oh, heavens, no!' thought Helga. 'Gosh, Martin is awful sometimes.'

The lady bowed graciously to this secretary, and for all I know, spoke afterwards of her beauty. Helga bowed too, a look from Martin having only just stopped her from dropping a curtsey. Then they all walked onward through the galleries, the royal visitor and her companion (presumably a lady-in-waiting) listening respectfully to Martin, the boy from Omar Square and followed by the girl from Hagen Street, to whom no one need listen, since nervousness had bereft her of speech.

When he had shown the lady all the furniture and the objects of virtu, he turned her eyes to the pictures and interested her

in them. He got porters to bring more pictures from the stock-room and stand them on easels and stools before her. And again and again, as he pointed out the beauties of a painting to the royal lady and her companion, he saw in his mind's eye, and with a peculiarly sharp delight, the Commercial Road and a weary pedlar pushing open a public house door with a few ill-painted postcards in his hand.

At one stage, as they moved towards a new show-room, Majesty turned towards Helga, who was walking in a state of quivering apprehension, two paces behind the lady-in-waiting. A girl novice climbing the Scafell Pinnacle for the first time or let us say the abominable Innominate, and lying third on the rope, could not more certainly wish herself anywhere else on the surface of our Earth, and when Royalty turned thus suddenly towards her it seemed that the rope must fray and break.

'They are most beautiful pictures, are they not?' said the great lady to her with a smiling 'graciousness.' 'It must be wonderful to be working always among such beautiful things.'

'Yes, it is . . . it is . . .' stuttered Helga. 'Yes.'

'And Mr. Herriot says—come a little closer, child—Mr. Herriot says you really are a great expert in pictures, Miss . . . er . . .' The graciousness had not quite encompassed Helga's name. 'Miss . . .'

'Horniman,' suggested Helga, being in such a state of confusion that her tongue, temporarily an autonomous member, spoke the name of the receptionist near the door instead of her own—why, Heaven knew. Perceiving this astounding error she clapped a hand against her mouth like a child before stammering in reply, 'Oh, no, Madam. I know very little . . . really.'

'That is not so, Madam,' said Martin. 'Miss Horniman is too modest. She knows a great deal. If I am in any doubt about a picture, I seek her judgment always.'

'How wonderful—and at your age, Miss Horniman!' The gracious smile rested on Helga like a sunbeam. 'How have you had time to amass so much knowledge?'

'But Martin . . . Mr. Martin Herriot is exaggerating. He is, really.'

'Not at all, Madam,' said Martin. 'I always say it is an inborn gift with Miss Horniman. Thank you, Miss Horniman.' And he dismissed her to the rear.

Helga fell back to her place with a heart pounding and sweat on her brow and hands, but with a feeling, I dare say, like that

of the young climber when the rope remains safely there, no matter how clumsy her climb. Martin had held the rope well.

When the great lady had seen all and stood again by his doors, she gave him a whimsical smile and asked, 'You know who I am?'

He bowed as to royalty. 'Yes, Madam.'

She laughed and said, 'I was afraid so. It is always the same, isn't it, Margot? Well, thank you, Mr. Herriot, for showing me all your beautiful things. Especially those very lovely pictures.' Graciously she put out her hand, which he took and bowed over.

'I am much honoured by your visit, Madam.'

'I have spent a most interesting morning. And I shall certainly remember all you said about the pictures. Believe me, I shall consider your advice.' *His* advice! The pedlar in the pub advising the Palace! 'I shall think it all over, and we'll come again, will we not, Margot?'

Margot said they would: what else could she say?

Then the lady gave her most gracious smile of the morning to Helga, and said, 'Thank you. Thank you so very much,' though Heaven knows what for, since Helga had not said a single word about any article or picture, about its provenance or its history or anything else.

But as the lady put out a hand to her, Helga was able to take it, quivering, and drop her curtsey.

'Goodbye, Mr. Herriot. We shall come again. Be sure of that.'

She came again, and this time it was not *incognita*. Her car had royal arms above its windscreen; her well-loved figure was instantly recognized; word that she was in the Omar Galleries ran along to Bond Street and all the regions round about; soon a crowd, two and three deep, stood on the opposite side of the road; police appeared in gutters and on kerbs, materializing, as they do, out of the surrounding air like Arabian djinn; press photographers came into spontaneous existence no less mysteriously; and next morning the newspapers carried a picture of Martin bowing Royalty from his threshold.

He considered these pictures again and again—and once more—and then walked from his flat to his galleries and advanced the price of most things eighty five-per-cent.

New York saw the picture in more than one of its gleaming weeklies, and the New York house began to stir in its sleep.

Soon it was on its feet and singing and flourishing like a man who had drunk of wine. Mr. Herriot, to the amazement and somewhat to the perturbation of his rivals, was now acting as agent in England for more than one American collector. He was also, to his own amusement, acting for one of the American dealers. One American financier, a hot competitor in the race for expensive pictures and for the kudos and culture they gave to a guy's home, promised him a flat hundred-per-cent on any really remarkable picture; and if you buy a picture for ten or twenty thousand pounds, this is a good commission for the morning's work.

Berl at this time was manager of the London gallery, as Martin had always intended him to be. His salary was generous, and he had long ago been able to move his marvelling old parents from the tiny house in Hagen Street to a tall and dignified home on Richmond Green. And one day Martin at his desk, after assessing, as he still loved to do, the probable value of his bank balances, his bank deposits, his stock, his good debts, and his investments, was so uplifted by the aggregate figure, so charged with high spirits, that he resolved to do, there and then, something that he'd often played with as an idea. He lifted the telephone to summon the Secretary of the firm—but put it back because he wanted to think about the past before he created a great and pleasing moment in the present.

And he sat with his hand by the telephone, thinking of Auntie Vera and his father and his school. All had been inclined to despise him. 'You'll never do anything with your life,' Auntie Vera used to say; and now he was a millionaire. 'Fend for yourself' his father had said when he asked his help; and he had fended for himself all right, so that he sat in this comfort now, a man of power because a man of wealth. And who knew what he might not yet achieve? To judge from careers very similar to his own, why not a knighthood—'Sir Martin Herriot'—and later a peerage—'Lord Herriot of Mile End Road.' His success could only mean that, no matter how he had failed at school, he was really much abler than most—a genius in his way. A wonderfully exhilarating, aye, intoxicating, thought to consider that perhaps he was a genius!

His father was dead now; a pity the man had never seen him in the fulness of his glory. Auntie Vera he never saw, and his brothers and sisters only seldom, but to all of these, including Auntie Vera, he was superabundantly generous; not wholly out

of goodwill (though he could afford plenty of that) but partly to teach them a lesson and slightly to humiliate them. In all his childhood, as he looked back on it, he could see only Berl and his parents who had believed in him and been always good to him. Alone in the world Mrs. Mickiewicz had loved him. He picked up the telephone again and began, ‘ Ask Mr. Berl to come, and Mr.—’ then stopped again and laughed, and said ‘ No, no, don’t. Neither of them, Mary. Not just yet,’ and put back the receiver.

He would rather do this thing privily and alone. It should be just between Berl and himself, alone. Always he preferred to do things alone, by secret ways. Quietly he left the galleries and visited his bank in Bond Street. At the bank he spoke with the Chief Clerk and came away with a document in his hand. Back at his large writing-table, all marquetry and gilt mounts, he filled in certain empty spaces on the document. Then, at last, bade his secretary ask Mr. Berl to come to him.

Waiting for Berl to appear, he looked at the past again and saw himself and Berl sitting in the Labour Exchange without hope—turned away from doors with apologetic words, ‘ Sorry, but we’ve no vacancies, old man,’ or impatient words, ‘ Can’t you *read*? Can’t you see that notice: “No men wanted”’; then queueing side by side for the dole, and shuffling sadly along together.

Berl entered, and Martin, leaning back in his fine armchair of carved and gilt wood, picked up the document. ‘ Berl, old boy,’ he said, ‘ this is something I’ve long wanted to do. Understand very clearly there’s to be no argument about this. I am your boss, and what I say is final. I am going to make you a present of a hundred of the original one-pound shares in the O.G.’s, so that you can be a director. It’s quite time you were a director.’

‘ *What?*’ exclaimed Berl. And he turned pale. His mouth with the thick lips opened, and he looked rather foolish. Even rather sick.

‘ Yes. A hundred. I thought that should be enough. A good round figure.’

‘ No, no, Martin! You mustn’t do this. It is ridiculous.’

You may wonder why he should be overthrown and pale and shaken by what looks to be no more than a bonus of a hundred pounds. But the truth, as I understand it with difficulty (and you, Sir Robert, will understand with ease) was something like

this. The original capital in the Omar Galleries was one thousand shares of one pound each, all of which had been allotted to Martin himself. These shares, thanks to the high profits of the firm over several years, had now risen to at least fifty times their original value, so that a holding of a hundred of them was worth five thousand pounds, and even more.

Berl was so unnerved by the offer that he sank to a seat by the desk. ‘No, Martin. I can’t let you do this. I won’t.’

‘Here is the transfer form. Sign or be sacked. We’ll get Helga in to witness our signatures. Mary, dear: send Miss Lindgren in here, please . . . Thank you. Here, Berl; here’s a pen. See: “I, Martin Herriot, in consideration of the sum of ten shillings——” you must give me *something* for them, and ten shillings won’t hurt you——“ten whole shillings paid by Berl Joseph Mickiewicz, hereinafter called the said Transferee do hereby——” Ah, Helga. We want you to witness our signatures to a little document.’ Martin signed and passed the paper to Berl. ‘Go on, Berly. Sign or be sacked.’

Berl drew the paper towards him but did not at once sign. His eyes were flooded, and he could not speak.

‘What is all this about?’ asked Helga. ‘Is he in disgrace? If it’s something I shouldn’t know, I won’t pursue the subject. But if I might know what it all means——’

‘You might not. It’s nothing to do with you. All you’ve got to do is to sign where I tell you.’

‘I’m not at all sure that I’ll sign anything unless I’m told what’s happening. I’m not someone who can be bullied into signing things. Or bullied in any way, come to that.’

‘You keep a civil tongue in your head, miss, or you’ll be fired too.’

‘But why is Berl almost weeping? Have you been brutal to him? I won’t have you being unkind to my Berl. I love him. I always have.’

‘No, he’s being too kind, Helga. Much too kind. I don’t know what to do. He’s trying to transfer a great wad of shares to me so that I can be a director. What shall I do? Do I sign it or not?’

‘I should do exactly what you like; I always do. Personally, I think you’d make a lovely director; but if you don’t want to be one, don’t.’

‘My God, am I master here or not?’ exclaimed Martin. ‘These are the rumblings of mutiny. It looks to me as though

there'll have to be some changes in this firm. Miss Lindgren, do exactly what you're told and order him to sign. At once.'

'I should sign, Berl, if I were you; and then we can all have some peace. If it's a lot of money, don't worry; he can afford it.'

Berl signed with a shaking hand, and Martin said, 'Thank you. You can go now,' not very politely and gathered up the document. To Helga he said, 'There now, Miss Lindgren, our Mr. Mickiewicz is now one of your directors, and in future, you will call him "sir".'

§

Berl at this time had his secret life too. In his home at Richmond, in buses and trains, and even on the carpeted floors of the Omar Galleries he would ponder his problems and his purposes hardly less than the quiet, secretive Martin. Martin, brooding, brooding ever, in the creened places of his mind, must have often been scheming and dreaming on the very same carpet as Berl. For years past, as you know, Berl had loved Helga Lindgren humbly and without hope. When he was no more than a waiter irfegularly employed he had watched her climbing into a class above him and thenceforward had no expectation but to see her married to some man of wealth and position. And when Martin came so strangely out of the mists, like some fairy godfather, and lifted him overnight to her new level, he still could not believe that he had a chance of being this man. It was not his poverty now that stifled hope; it was his smallness and his ugliness (both of which sat as permanent griefs in his mind) and his memories of Hagen Street and of his father's market stall.

Once only, with great timidity, even making a joke of the matter lest she found it ludicrous, he had come a li le way towards speaking of his love. He had said, grinning rather stupidly, 'You know, Lindy dear, that there's never been anyone else in the world for me but you. I suppose it isn't possible that——' but she had laid a hand on his to stop him, and said, 'Oh, I do love you, Berl. You're the dearest thing in the world. And easily the best person I know or have ever known. I love you terribly—but not like that—not in that way, my dear.' After that he never spoke of his love again but waited and watched, wondering when the man would appear and what like he would be.

And suddenly he began to observe, with surprise, that she and Martin were often together, and to think, 'Can it really be Martin who will have her? Martin!' This was something he had not expected at all. Perhaps he alone found it difficult to imagine this because he could remember Martin walking in the gutter behind him with a sandwich-board on his breast. But now he saw Helga and Martin going together to dinners and dances and supposed they were 'walking out' in the Hagen Street manner. He suspected, with a kind of placid pain, that they often kissed, but he did not think of them yet as engaged. And certainly he never dreamt that Helga of the pious home, Helga whose ideas were as conventional as her ambitions were high, could have given herself unmarried to any man. You see, Berl's home was pious too, and he could not but think that a woman who gave her virginity to any but her husband must be dissolute indeed.

This unforeseen fact that she could be content with Martin as a possible husband lessened his conviction that there was no hope for him, and for days and nights after Martin had made him that bewildering gift of shares and put him on the board of one of the most prosperous firms in London, he would debate the question, Could he, should he, approach her again? Could he go and ask her, quite simply, whether there was any understanding between Martin and her and, if not, whether, now that he was a man of some wealth, and she at twenty-six had married no other, he could hope again.

Helga had long since left her residential club and was now living in a little flat high up in a mountainous modern building called Paris Court in Knightsbridge. The stairs and corridors that led to her flat were all pink walls and thick golden carpets and soft tinted lights, and her flat, though tiny, was so handsomely furnished that it came as no disappointment after this approach through softness and luxury. The splendid pieces of French furniture in its rooms stirred no suspicions in Berl. Had not Martin lent him for the Richmond home many pieces quite as fine, and far more of them than this; had he not even offered, with a laugh, to pay him for housing and looking after them? The furniture in Helga's flat was but further proof of Martin's gift for munificence. And over and above this, there was Berl's complete inability to think of Helga as a kept woman.

So he pondered and pondered and at last on a Sunday afternoon, after a morning plunged in thought, he left his home in

Richmond and came all the way on the top of a bus to Knightsbridge. It was a long journey, but not once did he glance at the Sunday newspaper on his lap; he just sat on his front seat, with his neat umbrella against his knees, and his eyes on the road before him, seeing little of its traffic, because he was seeing only Helga as child and woman, and wondering what he would know in an hour's time.

At Paris Court there was a golden lift that could have raised him to Helga's high floor but, not wishing to be taken quite so quickly to his answer, which he feared would be pain, he climbed the six flights slowly and, towards the end, breathlessly. He slowed his doubting steps even more as he walked the long golden carpet to her door.

When he had forced himself to ring he heard her come running to the door like an excited schoolgirl—like the Helga of Hagen Street—almost as if she knew he was coming and was overjoyed to open to him. She flung open the door with a smile that might have accompanied the welcoming arms of a lover. Her face was made up more than he'd ever seen it before: eyelids blue-shadowed, eyelashes weighted with mascara, wide-lipped mouth a rich red bow. God, she looked beautiful, and what hopes had he? But if—if she did not discourage him—if he might hope—and if he might then kiss her, what an exquisite delight, what a rapture.

'Berl!' she cried, with pleasure certainly, but also with surprise. 'Berl! How lovely! Come in, my dear, I *am* having visitors this afternoon! You are coming to tea too.'

'Why? Are you expecting someone else?'

'Am I not? To be sure, I am. But that won't matter. We shall love to have you too. "The more we are together"—' she broke into the song which was popular at the time—"the happier we shall be";' and she led him, softly singing it, into her little oblong drawing room.

There, on a coffee table in the centre, was a tray spread with the valuable Rockingham tea-set which Martin had given her. (He had given a Spode set to Berl). Seeing this elegant display, Berl looked again at the pieces of ornate furniture so like those in Martin's flat, and couldn't help thinking that the room resembled a canvas on which the work of a powerful master completely overshadowed the hand of his pupil. It made the pupil seem obedient and simple indeed.

'Who's it who's coming, Lindy? Someone I know?'

'Why, of course! It's our Martin.'

The words made an aching bullet in his heart, and he said, 'Oh, well then, perhaps I had better not stop. If he's coming to see you, he won't want me.'

'Nonsense, Berl darling. He loves you. You should hear him talking about you. He says you're the best person he's ever known, and of course he's right. Sit down. Sit down there exactly.' She made him sit on a love seat of painted and gilt wood, and herself sat on a tapestried chair near by. 'No, don't fidget, I insist you're to stay for a little. Why, you've come miles and miles. Martin has only to come across the Park. I sometimes think you're the only person in the world he loves. You and his old Daniel Deakin.'

'And you too?'

'Oh, yes. He loves me. I forgot that. But that's all. Just us three. No one else.'

He was about to ask, 'How much does he love you?' but stayed the words and asked instead, 'How soon are you expecting him?'

She cast an eye at a Sévres clock standing on the mantelpiece between its two attendant vases. 'Oh, any time now.'

'That clock is new, isn't it? Where is the little Harlequin group which used to stand on the corner there, alone? Quite alone.'

'Oh, don't ask me. It's too sad. It's too awful. I had a little party here the other night and a man, a clumsy beast, leant on the mantelpiece and knocked it off with his loathsome elbow. He was terribly apologetic, and I had to make him think I didn't mind, but oh, I did, I did! I wanted to rush away and cry. After the party was over I went and looked at the poor little swept-up fragments and cried and cried. For years my little Harlequin has stood there to remind me of the beginning of everything.'

'The beginning of *what?*' asked Berl, and feared for his answer.

'Oh, you know what I mean: the beginning of our friendship with Martin, yours and mine, and all our good fortune since. He changed our lives, didn't he? And now it's smashed and in ruins, my mascot! I'm sure it's a bad omen. Of course it is. It means that I've been getting above myself, coming here and living in luxury and—oh, doing a lot of things I oughtn't to do—and the Gods are angry. That's exactly what it means, isn't it?'

No, it isn't. It doesn't mean anything of the sort. Omens are all nonsense, aren't they? They are? Tell me they are. Say it, Berl.' She beat an impatient fist on an imaginary table. 'Say it *quickly*.'

'Omens are nonsense, my dear. I smashed a mirror once, long ago, and expected seven years of bad luck, but I've had nothing but good fortune ever since.'

'Oh, thank you, Berl. And I think I believe you. I *think* I do. Perhaps I shall have good fortune after all. How nice!'

'How long will it really be before Martin comes?'

Again she looked at the clock. 'Five minutes . . . ten minutes.'

'Oh dear!'

'Why "oh dear"? Won't you be glad to see him?'

'I wanted to talk to you alone. I wanted to ask you a question.'

'Ask it now.'

'It's something I asked you once before.'

'What was that, Berl darling?'

'Only if. . . .'

'Yes?'

'Only, if, now that, thanks to Martin, I'm fairly well-to-do and could make you a home worthy of you, you perhaps—you might—I mean, you know I've never concealed what I feel for you—'

But, as that previous time, she stopped him. She left her chair and, sitting beside him on the love seat, laid an affectionate and compassionate hand on his. 'Oh, Berl, don't. No, no, please don't. That's for ever impossible. It's lovely of you to want it, but it isn't possible. Never now.'

'There's someone else?'

'Yes.'

'It's Martin, isn't it?'

'Yes. Martin.'

'Helga, I'm a perfect fool, but I never, never, saw this. A little while ago I suspected it; that's all. Does he love you?'

'I think so.'

'Really properly?'

'I'm afraid so.'

'And you're going to marry him?'

She blushed, her lips came tight together, her head went to one side, and she did not immediately answer. Then, smiling, she said, 'One day . . . perhaps. . . .'

Berl, after a sigh, said, 'Well, if it can't be me, I'm glad it's

Martin. At least——’ he rose from the love seat and walked towards the window—‘ I think I am. But I don’t know. I don’t quite know. I love old Martin, but he’s a strange creature: different from any other man I’ve ever met.’

‘ How? In what way?’

‘ He’s capable of doing such extraordinary things all of a sudden, in a moment, overnight, as it were; and I’ve always felt that there was a strange quality of wildness, or some such, in this suddenness. It has always disturbed me a little when he has acted instantaneously like that. For instance, when he was still only nineteen he threw off every pretence of civilized living and took to the road as a tramp. I induced him to come and lodge with us in the winter, but suddenly—in a moment—with hardly a preparatory word—he was gone again; he disappeared into the winter and we heard no more of him for years. Then he reappears and finds me working as a waiter, and what does he do? At once, without a thought, he pitches me into the highly skilled, and highly social, job of an art dealer. I am enormously grateful to him, of course, but it was an extraordinary thing to do. Then, as you saw, he suddenly, without a previous word, calls me in and makes me a gift of stock worth thousands——’

‘ It’s just that he loves you. He’ll give anything to anyone he loves. I shouldn’t like to tell you all that he’s given me.’

‘ Well . . . yes, yes . . . ’ Berl came away from the window. ‘ But a man who is wild in his kindness can be unbridled in other ways too. Heaven knows he rejoices to be quite ruthless in business. Still, I hope . . . I’m sure you’ll be happy with him.’ He went back to the love seat. ‘ You’ll have to bear with him sometimes. He’s a merry soul for most of the day, but he can be very morose and gloomy too.’

‘ Don’t I know it?’ said Helga in an undertone.

‘ I’ve known him, perhaps after a bout of sleeplessness, sink into a depression too deep for any man to reach him. I’ve even wondered if he’d be able to get out of it before he did something desperate.’

‘ I know, Berl; I have seen it too. Berl, I’m going to tell you the truth. I love him, I love him with all my heart, and yet I’m sometimes afraid of him.’

‘ I don’t think *you* need ever be afraid of him.’

‘ But I am, Berl; I am. I think partly it’s just because he’s so successful, but more it’s because there really is something

hard in him, something rather merciless. There are times when he's horribly harsh with me, and then I can hate him and fear him for a little, though I'm knowing all the time that I love him madly and that he can do what he likes with me and that I am almost enjoying it because he's unkind to me—and that I'm never loving him so passionately as when I hate him. How mad we all are. Especially women.'

'Martin harsh with *you*—I can't believe it.'

'Generally it's if this flat is looking untidy or unlovely or if I'm looking awful, as I can, sometimes. He's quick to use words like "slovenly" and "slatternly" and to say "Does nobody but me care that things should be beautiful?"—cruelly quick to hit out at me like that. I tell you I'm terrified sometimes, if he arrives before I've got the flat as beautiful as possible, and myself too.'

'I can understand it all so well. He——'

'He says it's because he had too much filth and disorder in his home as a child.'

'It's a deeper need than that, Helga. I can see it all. You are the one thing perfectly right in his life—or the one thing he wants perfectly right. His rooms and his furniture and his fame all mean a lot to him, but none of them can compare with you and your love. Oh, I can understand it; and, Helga darling, I am going to leave him to it.' He rose. 'God bless you both. I'm glad on the whole it's Martin. He's a good man. And now I'll leave you to him.'

'Oh no, Berl, you must stay. Please! For a little. There's plenty of time. There's all life before us.'

'No, no; if not for your sake, then for mine, I'm going. I'd rather be alone, just now.'

'You're not too unhappy? Please be happy.'

'Well. . . .' and he smiled. 'Naturally I'm not deliriously happy . . . just at the moment. But I shall get over it. And I'm glad it's Martin. Goodbye, Lindy dear.'

As Berl left the flat and walked towards the lift he heard steps upon the stairs. Someone was coming up slowly. They were soft sounds but audible. Martin? At this moment he could not meet Martin—Martin coming to his joy. And even though Berl was still unable to think of this joy as more than a lover's kisses, the thought was torment enough to force him to watch and suffer the approach of Martin to her door. He walked a little further out of sight. The steps were now on the

fifth flight, and very slow. Why had Martin, in his turn, not taken the lift? Then Berl remembered that Martin had a claustrophobic fear of tiny lifts; he felt caged in them, and his imagination would show him himself spring-locked in a prison cell. ‘Why should I not one day find myself in prison?’ he would ask, laughing. ‘One never knows. My deeds are evil. As Berl will tell you, the prices I charge are criminal. He’s rebuked me for them a thousand times. And one day, perhaps, the cops will get interested in some of my other dealings. But let me assure you: the minute the door of the cell slams on me I hang myself from its window bars.’ Sometimes the imagination was so sharp that for an intolerable second he would suffer the actual horror of being bricked up in a narrow cell and have to shake his head to shake it away.

Watched by Berl, Martin arrived on the landing and walked to Helga’s door. It was swung open for him and her arms welcomed him with a passionate embrace. Berl heard her voice: ‘Darling! Darling!’ Taking him by the fingers, she led him within, and the door shut. Berl, head drooping a little, and jaw out-thrust, went down the way that Martin had come.

§

As Dr. Shelley said this, a gong rang long and loud in the hallway of the Pavey Ark Hotel. He exclaimed, ‘No! No, it can’t be!’ and looked at his wrist-watch. ‘Fifteen minutes past seven.’

‘Oh, no!’ echoed Sadie. ‘Go on with the story. A little longer. Please.’

‘As late as that?’ It was Sir Robert speaking. ‘Shows how you’ve entranced us, doctor.’

‘Fifteen minutes past seven,’ repeated Dr. Shelley. ‘And a fine night. We must dress. Look at me: shorts and a blue sweater. Would you have me appear at dinner like that?’ And here he put forth some of his old-fashioned and perhaps excessive gallantry. ‘And the ladies: I think that, not even to hear the end of this strange, eventful history, will they forgo making themselves beautiful for dinner. Not that this will require much effort on the part of your two ladies, Sir Robert. I think you will agree with me in that.’

But Sir Robert wasn’t listening. He was looking up at the mountains in the west. The sun was falling towards the crown

of Borran Moor and the long level skyline beyond it, which the doctor had named the Innominate Ridge. The sky behind this darkening ridge was like a blue backcloth floodlit with a saffron gold. ‘What a night!’ he said. ‘Have you ever noticed that the mountains seem to come closer in the low light of the sun? They seem to be approaching us like great beasts.’

‘It’s because those in the shadow are turning into dark silhouettes, and those in the light have every tree and boulder lit up by the low sun,’ said Lady Spellman. ‘Everything on them is unnaturally clear.’

‘Yes, and everything in the valley is unnaturally bright,’ said Sadie. ‘Come: I suppose we must go.’

‘It’s going to be fine tomorrow,’ said Sir Robert, rising. ‘The wind’s back in the right quarter.’

‘Then we must finish tonight.’ Dr. Shelley rose too. ‘That is, if you really wish to hear the end. You do? Very well. We have the hotel to ourselves, and it will be pleasant by the fire.’

PART III

We gathered round the fire after we had drunk our coffee and put aside the cups. Sir Robert poked up a flame from the logs and sat with elbows on his knees and the poker still in his hand. Sadie said, 'Now *please*, Dr. Shelley.'

And Dr. Shelley resumed.

Years have passed while we were dining, children. The face of things is greatly changed. Martin is a very great man now. What he is worth in dollars or pounds is beyond my computation, but he is famous as a munificent donor to all good causes: to art galleries and hospitals and the Royal National Lifeboat Institution and (here he must have been indulging his love of a secret, sardonic humour) the Society for the Provision of Assistant Clergy. His name as a philanthropist is 'News' in the world. And no wonder, for one of his gifts was certainly in the sum of half a million pounds.

Believe it or not—and this will take some believing—he is also a sidesman at the Holy Innocents' Church, Park Gate. This, I gather, was a nominal appointment after he had subscribed an enormous sum for the restoration of the church's roof, but he did put in an appearance at Morning Prayer occasionally, and he was extremely friendly with the old Vicar. According to Berl, he would sit with the Vicar and discuss for hours, over whiskies and sodas, the increasing depravity of the world. Especially he would deplore the collapse of all the old morality among the young people of the day, who seemed to glory in their fornications and adulteries. And he would agree fervently with the Vicar in bewailing a general slackening in the moral fibre of business men, who, alas, no longer appeared to pride themselves on their scrupulous honesty and fair dealing.

Berl heard some of these friendly discussions and the amazing thing is that for a time he took quite as seriously as the old Vicar much of this genial hypocrisy of Martin's. Martin's sorrowful head-shakings and repinings over the immorality of youth helped to blind Berl to his true relation with Helga.

He was 'News' also as what the papers call a 'west end financier' and a 'property millionaire'. It seems that he had developed an eye for the profit hiding in property as for that awaiting acceptance in a picture. Just as Michael Angelo saw an angel buried in a block of marble so Martin would see a blessed profit lying ready for his chisel in a block of London houses. Or shall I say in a block of property shares? His steady buying of the shares would send their value up and up, and then he would sell out, taking a profit of anything from ten to fifty thousand pounds. Often, as I understand it, his was a kind of 'threat-buying'. His slow, relentless purchasing threatened control of the property, so that the directors were forced into finding some financial backer who would help them to buy him out at his own figure; and his own figure would not be low.

You could call it an honest blackmail.

I imagine he was a 'multi-millionaire' now, but he never left his flat in Park Gate Terrace nor moved Helga from hers at Paris Court. There was no reason why he should do so, he who had so few friends, no love of society, and no desire for an expansive luxury, so long as he had his modicum of beauty and comfort around him in office and home.

I was so interested in all that he told me, and all that Berl told me, that some time ago I amused myself searching in old newspaper files for any mention of this now forgotten financier. It was a wearisome task, but I found a few. Generally they reported his profit on a deal as 'in the region of a hundred or two hundred thousand pounds', but I had little doubt they exaggerated these figures to make a 'story', after the manner of their kind. It was fascinating to read the terms they used in order to cast an aura of mystery around him. One used the very words, 'a mystery man'. Another said, 'No one knows much about him, either his place or origin or his school, or how he came into the big money or what he is really worth.' A third called him 'this princely and bold adventurer in the security and property world.' One reporter contrived an interview with him: she was a woman journalist, and Martin was always courteous to women. The lady wrote him up in the familiar style. She spoke of his small but tastefully furnished flat, his lack of all pomposity, pretentiousness, and extravagance, his quiet voice and charm of manner, his great reserve that 'amounted almost to a disarming secretiveness', and the sense of power that radiated

from him. ‘It is impossible,’ she said, ‘to be long in his presence without feeling this sense of power.’

§

That is Martin, since we last saw him. But Berl is no longer to be seen on the richly carpeted floors of the Omar Galleries. Nor anywhere near them. He is far enough away from them in sheer space and very much farther in social distance. He is back among the little streets of the East End, among his own people, and his old parents are with him, not at all sorry to be back in Stepney and near the ghettos.

This is what happened. Though Berl had always foreseen that Helga must be the prize of another man than he, his pain, when he saw this as a fact before his eyes was far sharper than he had expected. He tried and tried to get adjusted to it, but could not. The daily proofs of her impassioned love for Martin only stimulated his sense of loss and at times his anguish. He would hear himself reiterating, aloud sometimes, ‘I must go, I must go.’

Now it seems that the motion generated by suffering may either, as with Martin, drive you towards a revolt from all good, or in the opposite direction, towards a craving to be good and to do good. I can see why Berl came to take the opposite road to Martin’s. His parents had brought him up in the fear and love of their Lord, and while I doubt the certain truth of their Proverbialist’s apothegm, ‘Train up a child in the way he should go and when he is old he will not depart from it’—all too often, when they are old enough, they depart from it at a run—I do think it would be true to say, ‘Train up a child in the way he should go and, after much suffering, he may come back to it.’ Then our Berl was in his every vein and tissue a Jew; and Jews, it would seem, will devote their native genius either to selfish acquisition or to brilliant spiritual service of Mankind—that is to say, either to Mammon or to God.

Wanting to be good, since thus only could he assuage his pain, Berl began to be troubled in his conscience about the work he was doing with Martin and the remuneration he received for it. He began to see himself not only as a profiteer but also as a parasite: a parasite since Martin and he were both sucking up a fortune out of the creative agonies of artists. What were they and the collectors they served (or milked) but gamblers

in pictures whose colours had been mixed with the blood and tears of poor struggling men? His work was no better, and no more productive of good—or of anything else—than that of a gambler in stocks and shares. He was now nearly forty and he wanted to do some good while it was yet day—for (as one of his race had said) the night cometh when no man can work.

For month after month he lived with a dream of ceasing to be an unprofitable servant and of giving his life to the workless and the destitute whom he'd known so well as a lad. He longed now to live like them, suffer with them, and be one of them; not giving to them from above (he'd done much of this) but sharing all things with them on their own level. It was the dream that has haunted all the saints since God first breathed a little of Himself into Adam's soul.

§ .

But this dream did not come to birth as a deed till, suddenly, a man touched his eyes for him, and a long myopia ended. Berl opened his eyes wide and saw that the unbelievable was true.

Late one evening he left the Galleries to go to Martin's flat and consult him about a proposal from an American dealer. So warm and bright was the lingering October sun—just such a light, I imagine, ladies, as we were looking at an hour ago—that he decided to walk across the Park, and he entered by the Grosvenor Gate and crossed the green expanse towards Victoria Gate. All the foliage, he told me, seemed afame in the sundown light, and high in the sky the swallows were wheeling and gliding before they flocked together and flew away. He came to a path between banks of massed flowers: dahlias and chrysanthemums and late gladioli. The butterflies hovered above the blooms, but Berl, London-born and London-reared, could not identify but only admire and rejoice in them.

The radiance of the evening was like repeated draughts of delight, and in after years he would often think how incongruous was this approach through a loveliness of light and flowers towards his pain.

He climbed the stairs to Martin's flat and touched the bell.

Only silence at first, and then steps, and Daniel Deakin's voice calling, 'There's some'un at door.'

A woman's voice from the far kitchen said, 'Oh Daniel, can

you go?' and his voice replied, 'Aw to 'ell with him, whoivver he is!'

He opened and peered into the dusk of the passage, screwing up his little eyes. He was in his shirt-sleeves, rolled up for work, and not only was his waistcoat flung open but the shirt too, disclosing a mat of grey hairs on his chest. He recognized the visitor and said, 'Aw, 'evenin', Berl.'

'Good evening, Daniel. Is Martin in?'

'Naw!' came the terse answer. 'He's aht.'

'Oh, he's out,' echoed Berl, disappointed.

Daniel agreed with the statement. 'Aye, me owd cock, he's aht.'

'Will he be back soon?'

'Hah should Ah knew? He muk'd off baht sayin' owt to Maisie and me. But coom in, lad; coom in and wait a little, if you like. Maisie! *Maisie!* Aw t'ell wi'tlass, wheer is she? What time did Martin muk off? An ahr ago? Aye, that's reet. Ah well, mebbe he woan't be back while late to-neet—if then. Tha'd better have a drink nah yer heer. That's what Ah suppose he'd want.'

Berl, following him into the drawing-room, thought 'Old Danicl's accent's at its very broadest this evening. Does that mean he's had a row with Martin?' for he had long observed that Daniel could be a little afraid of his master and, when in this condition, would hide it beneath his broadest and bruskest Yorkshire.

Daniel went to the Leleu chest veneered in tulip and purple woods, which Martin had converted into a cocktail cabinet, and, opening it, asked rather ungraciously, 'What'll ye have? What you want? A cocktail? No? A gin and water. Aw reet. Just as you like.'

He mixed the drink with one little eye closed and the glass held up before the other. 'Eh, aye. Theer y'are. Ah'll have t'saam.' Pouring himself a similar mixture, he drank once and twice of it, after which, apparently, he felt much better. 'Eh . . . ah . . .' he breathed, with something like a sigh of satisfaction. 'Ah, well. Here's to thee, lad. All luk to thee—but spit on tha finger if tha sees a white horse—as we say in Luddonbridge. Drink yours dahn. Clean aht yer empty teeth wi' that one, and then have another.'

'No, this is enough. If you don't think he'll be back till late I won't stay. Do you know where he is?'

'Ah do not. He went off baht tellin' me nowt. But Ah guess ma notion where he is wouldn't be far wrong. Aye, Ah've a fair idea where he is. And all Ah can say is, Ah only hope everything's in its proper place there—not an inch aht—and it's all as clean as pie. Because he wur in t'mood to fly off t'handle just because t'edge of a curtain wurn't hangin' in t'reet fold. Did ye ivver hear onything so daft?'

'Ah,' thought Berl, taking another sip from his glass, 'so that was it!'

'Martin's gettin' fair irritable these days. Ah doan't know what cooms over him sometimes. He's takin' to sayin' things Ah doan't care for at all. Yes, Maisie? *What?* Oh, it's Berl, and Ah can't coom; so howd thy noise. He says 'em to me—not to Maisie. Maisie's the one person he nivver says owt the least uncivil to. He nivver used to be unpleasant to me, but he's fair started now. Not allus, mind you, but more often nor Ah like. It gets me fair fed oop, till Ah've half a mind to gi' him a box on t'lug. Has he happen started on you?'

'No,' said Berl. 'He's never rude to me.'

'Well, it'll happen to you. You wait. "Am Ah t'only person in t'world," he says, "that likes things beautiful and in order?" And, blimey, Ah mind him when he'd no but a tanner in bludy world and only a few muky rags to his back! Ah gave him a coat and paid for his dinner—leastways the Salvation Army paid for it. But this Ah *will* say, Berl: that wur the best nine-pence Ah ivver let t'Army lay aht for me. He fair paid me back for it. He said then—that very neet!—he said as he'd get to t'top and, bah gum, he has! And do you know why, Berl?'

'No. Why, Daniel?'

Daniel drank; wiped his lips with the hairy back of his hand; and looked knowing, very knowing. 'Ah'll tell the'. Ah'll tell thee in a sentence. This is t'divvil's world, and them as does t'divvil's work gets on fine in it, because it's their father's kingdom. Hah's that for t'truth?'

'You think he's doing the devil's work?'

'Well, what do *you* think? What Ah says is, You can't make bludy millions baht a divvil of a lot of hokery-pokery soomwhere.' He tapped the side of his nose sagaciously. 'And that's a nice word for aht-and-aht roguery.'

'And you don't mind receiving some of the fruits of this roguery?'

'Do Ah?—hell! Not I. Ah long ago gave up mindin' who

Ah worked for, s'long as they paid me. Why, one time Ah wur on t'other side of fence, workin' for t'dear Lord instead of t'divvil; aye, Ah wur, an' all! Ah once took Meetin' when t'Major and t'Lieutenant wur away; and did Ah tell t'lads abaht their sins? Gobblimey, Ah wouldn't say as Ah didn't save some of 'em that neet. But nah it seems Ah'm back on wrong side of fence—well, all I can say is, pay's better on this side. Nivver had so much brass in me life.'

But Berl, having been subjected to much of this crude merriment before, was no longer listening. He was recalling those words, 'I've a fair idea where he is' and Daniel's would-be wise look as he spoke them, and he must probe deeper. 'Is there any hope that Martin'll be back by dinner time?'

'More likely by breakfast time.' Daniel refilled his glass; drank; and then looked at Berl, as it were sideways, his nearer eye particularly bright with knowledge. 'Nay, he'll not be back. He's havin' summat better nor dinner, tha can bet thi boots.'

Berl felt the first sharp prick of the knife—a knife impossible to believe in, intolerable to feel. I am not hearing this. This is not happening. But I must speak—end this silence. 'What—what are you suggesting?'

'Ah'm suggestin' that if he's where Ah think he is, he'll bide there while Lord knows when. For most o' neet, like enough.'

'What are you trying to say, Daniel? I don't understand you.'

'Tha knows as well as Ah do what Ah mean.'

'You mean . . . he's with Helga?'

'O'coorse Ah do. T'lad's got it reet bad. He's fair crazed abaht her. Ower head an' lugs in love, if ever lad was. And, on whole, Ah don't wonder. She's a bonny lass, you'll allow. You should hear Maisie on her, and when a woman allows as another woman's luvly, you can bet she's summat more nor just pretty as lasses ought to be.'

'But, Daniel—no, thank you, no, I want no more to drink; I want no more—are you suggesting that he and she——'

'Doan't tell me tha doesn't know hah they stand wi' each other. Though mebbe standin's hardly the word.'

'You mean she's—she's his mistress?'

'O'coorse Ah do.'

'Well then——' Berl's mouth became a line of angry rebuttal—'I just don't believe you.' Where ever did Martin

get that hideous over-ornamented secretaire from? It's worse than the one in his office. His *office*. A place of pain for evermore. 'I don't begin to believe you.'

'Hah d'you mean; don't believe me?' The little eyes were now hard, the creased mouth sour. 'D'you mean Ah'm lyin'?'

'It's impossible. It's impossible, what you say.'

'Then I'm a liar, am I?'

'Oh, damn lying! It's possible to get things wrong. I'd rather say you'd got it all hopelessly, shockingly wrong. Helga is not like that.'

Daniel stared, and suddenly sat down, as if collapsing in the presence of such blindness. 'Eh, an' Ah allus thowt thee a smart lad! Ah nivver supposed tha wur as blind as a pony down pit. Well—' he was now in a good temper and the forgiving vein—'tha art a silly gowk, Berl.'

'I'd want proof before I believ'd a word of this.'

'Proof? *Proof*, lad? You'd have all the proof you want if you stayed here a week. Why, lad, he brings her here, and Ah make their bed for 'em.'

Words which drove the knife home in Berl's heart. He could say nothing.

And Daniel continued. 'Ayc, an' do Ah envy Martin when she cooms, dressed like a dish for him? Do Ah wish Ah wur in his shoes? Do Ah think of him as he wur when—but you're lookin' pale. Are yer feelin' all reet? Surely you aren't as shocked as all that? Why, Maisie don't object to it any more. She wurn't so set on it at beginnin'. Ah'd a job to persuade her to show some sense. Women like to pretend they're as pure as the first-fallen snow—they like to pretend it even to their husbands who know all abaht 'em—but Ah says to her, What's his business is his business, and not mine or thine. Just because you doan't howd with it, theer's no reason why he shouldn't. There's lots as do howd with it. And even if all t'world wur agreed that it was wrong, Ah'd still stand in wi' Martin. He's done more for me nor onyone else ivver has. Ah says to her, He were loyal to me, and nah Ah'm goin' to be loyal to him, so you keep your eyes—or, any road, your mouth—shut. And now, blimey, *she* goes and makes their bed sometimes.'

Berl had laid his glass aside. 'Don't!' He began an agonized plea—but arrested it and said only, 'I must go. I have to get home.'

'No, doan't go yet awhile. Ah enjoy a bit of a blather.

Maisie says Ah'm a proper owd blatherskite. Have another drink. Martin'd want you to.'

'No, I'd rather go. I—I have a lot to do.'

'Well, if tha mun, tha mun. Is there any message you'd like me to give Martin?' he asked, as they walked to the door.

'No . . . no . . . I'll speak to him in the morning.'

'Eh, aye. Ah well. So long, Berl, old boy. Behave thyself.'

Berl smiled gently at the quip, and the door shut on him. He went down the stairs, slowly, with his heart rocking, and his head sick. .

§

All that night Berl lay with his eyes closed but his brain working and warming and suffering behind them. 'She is in his arms now. Perhaps even at this moment he is getting his joy out of her.' He had long known, of course, that this hour must come to him, but so does a man know that he must die, and puts the thought from him. Berl had not expected that he must go on the rack so soon and so suddenly, but now here it was, and he must lie upon it and endure his torment throughout the long night. Often in the night he opened his eyes and saw the darkness still in the room; at other times, in an angry impatience with his inability to sleep, he tossed and turned, and straightened his limbs; and turned again. He prayed, 'O God let me sleep,' and, having started prayer, heard himself repeating the Night Prayer for Young Children which his mother used to make him say in her hearing: 'May it be thy will, O Lord my God and God of my fathers, to suffer me to lie down in peace. . . .'

But the prayer brought no peace. Not till daylight did he fall into a doze and then his sleep was lit with distress, and he was soon awake again. Awake and thinking and tossing; tossing and thinking.

But suddenly, even as the daylight brightened in the room he began to see the distant gleam of new and different days ahead of him. He had been saying—the words had been beating in his head—'I must go. I must go. I must go as far as possible from the sight of them;' and as he asked himself, 'Where to?' he saw this distant gleam. The selfish desire to escape from pain came and ranged itself with that old unselfish desire to go and give himself to the destitute and the outcast.

The two stood side by side in double harness, ready to draw him away.

And he began—not to be happy—but to see a happiness in the distance when this pain should be overpast.

He did not speak of this to Martin for some days: the seed must have its days and nights in his mind's deep privacy, there to germinate and grow. During the days, in the Galleries, he kept his eyes from Helga and Martin; in the evenings he walked in the parks, Hyde Park or Richmond Park, thinking. Could he—could he give up his beautiful home in Richmond and all the luxury and comfort which it was his Jewish nature to enjoy; could he really face again the hard dusty streets of Stepney with their dins and smells and squalor? The Indian summer was still over England, and it was on a warm Sunday afternoon, as he crossed the great area of grass between the Ring Road and the North Ride in Hyde Park, that he came upon decision. He had stopped quite still and lifted his eyes to the clean sky and said, ‘Show me what to do.’ And again, so great the bias which his mother had laid in his childish mind, he found himself speaking words from the Morning Prayer for Young Children: ‘O my God . . . open my heart to thy Law . . .’

Nothing happened as he walked on; nothing that could seem like an answer to prayer. Berl half-believed in ‘signs from Heaven’, because sometimes in his secret life the apparent answer to a petition had been so startling as almost to frighten him. It was a terrible thing then to feel the closeness of the living God.

But nothing today, until—as he was walking on past the children shouting at play and the people reclining in their green hammock-chairs—his eyes fell upon the tramps and vagabonds lying prone upon the grass and seeking the forgetfulness of sleep beneath this kindly sun. There were many of them among the happier people, and they lay like the selected dead after the air-raiders have passed and the bombs fallen.

Consider the castaways in the field. . . . Walking on, hands joined at his back, Berl looked at them, one after another, and at length he saw one who was plainly very young, eighteen perhaps, sleeping with his face in the grass and an arm outflung: a ragged, unshaven figure, a fallen scarecrow in ill-assorted clothes, his dark dishevelled hair overlaying the greasy collar of his jacket.

Of whom was this prostrate figure reminding him? Martin.

The next morning he went in and spoke to Martin. Helga was in Martin's office as he went in: she might be his kept plaything now, but she was also his secretary, partly because she enjoyed her work in the Galleries, but more because she could not bear to be away from him, and he too wanted her to be always with him. As he told me long afterwards, in his Inlands garden, he liked to gaze at her and get a private exultation at the thought that she was his. It was the same private pleasure as that with which, in the early days of his success, he would consider his incredible possession of thousands at the bank.

Martin was sitting at his large writing table with the gilt mounts, Helga in a Venetian baroque chair with low curved arms and a painted frame. He was leaning right back so that his chair tilted, and grinning at her impishly. Berl saw that he'd been teasing her. She was looking a little sulky and flushed, as if in his teasing he had said rather more than she cared to accept as fun.

'Hallo, Berl. You're just in time to save me. She's letting me have it; in a moment she'll throw something at me. Never was there anyone who rises so vehemently—not to say viciously—in defence of her own faultlessness. One breath of criticism, and you unleash the flood. You get a whole Niagara on top of you. I've dared to suggest that she's thinking all the time about the beauty of her face—mind you, I don't wonder—instead of getting on with her work, and she's given me twenty minutes of great wrath and anger. She really shouldn't be so rude to her boss. Enjoin her to behave herself. She'll do what you tell her. She has a far higher opinion of you than of me. And justly.'

'He's being just beastly, Berl,' said Helga.

Berl did not answer this or look at her. His heart was not free of fear as he stood before Martin. He confessed to me that in these last years with Martin, he was a little afraid of him, so full of power had his personality become. This was something he could never have believed would happen, but come it had, this faint, uneasy inferiority—come to him, as to Helga and to Deakin.

'Martin, can I speak to you?'

Martin saw the seriousness in his face—even a sadness—and changed his tone. 'Why, of course, old boy. Shall we expel our Helga or let her stay?'

'I'd like her to be here, I think.'

'Good lord, what's coming? Is it something serious?'

'Martin . . . I'm afraid I want to leave you. I've been thinking about it a long time.'

Martin, who'd been leaning back, sat up in alarm. 'You mean you want to quit the business?'

'Oh no, Berl! No.' Helga interposed. 'No, Berl darling, *please*. I won't have it. I like to have you somewhere near. I've always had you somewhere near. It's particularly important to feel you're there when Martin's been rather beastly to me. I should be all alone with him if you left. No, you *can't* go.'

But Berl could not look at her. Her voice was full of kindness but every sentence it spoke was a glancing pain. 'Yes, Martin, I'm afraid I've quite made up my mind.'

'But why? You've never said a word of this. He can't leave us. Can he, Helga?'

'No, no.' The distress in her voice was real.

'What's upsetting you, Berl? No—come! You belong to us as no one else does. Remember the Labour Exchange and the dole queue. We were side by side then, and we ought to stay side by side now. That makes sense, doesn't it, Helga? And remember our sandwich boards. We wore the same uniform then; can't we go on wearing the same, but rather nicer, uniform now?'

'Yes, yes.' Helga had risen and placed a hand on his elbow. 'Please don't go, Berl. Stay. Stay with us.'

'You are happy with us, aren't you, Berl?'

'Well, no . . . not exactly . . . you see . . .' and, stuttering, he told them why he was not really happy. To every man his own conscience, he said, but, for his part, he'd long been disturbed by the thought that the work of the Omar Galleries was purely acquisitive—

'Sure!' laughed Martin. 'That was my idea exactly—' and that it was parasitical on society—
'Berl, my dear boy, you couldn't put it better—'
—and that he'd like to give up his life to, well, service of some sort.

'Oh, my God, Helga! Oh dear, oh dear, oh dear. Our Berl's gone all holy. He was always Holy Mike at school.'

'I know; I remember the boys in Hagen Street would sometimes shout that after him, when he'd stopped them bullying someone—little Helga Lindgren quite likely. I used to hate

them for it, because he was far nicer than any of them.'

'Well, now you see: he's relapsed. He's slid back with a bump into holiness. But we mustn't tease him; he's not enjoying it. What exactly is it you want to do, Berly old boy?'

'I'm not clear yet. I just feel that I—my idea is that, if I could find some way of doing it, I'd try to help the lads who are like what we were, Martin, when we were on the ribs, and any others who are down and out.'

'In what way would you help them?'

'I don't know yet. I like to think one will be helped, somehow, and shown the way. At present I'm playing with the idea of some sort of club for lads of seventeen and over. It's at seventeen and eighteen that they're so often thrown on to the waste, as you and I know, Martin. You remember what it was like: nowhere in the house where one could rest, because one was ashamed to be there, and only the street to go to, and only a doorway when it rained. And you remember the awful degradation that began to set in like a kind of consumption, when it seemed that no one cared for you, neither God nor man, and you just drifted about hopelessly from hour to hour.'

As he spoke he felt Helga's eyes fixed on him. And he felt an affection and admiration in them, but these only hurt him—seared him like a warmth from a fire which he could not bear.

'I do remember,' said Martin with an old anger in his voice. 'I decayed and drifted till I chose a different way. I decided that if neither God nor man cared for me, I would care for neither God nor man. The only thing I thank those days for is that I've never been troubled since with any admiration for your God—still less with any love for him—and certainly with no love for my fellow-men—least of all for those with the money and the power.' The anger was getting hot in him. Old embers had flared, and he rose from his chair with the heat of them; but having risen he stood still—very still: it was as if some cold stone statue should flush with fire within. 'I've enjoyed fighting them and blood-letting their money out of them with weapons just about as dirty as their own. And I hope to do a lot more of that surgery yet. But, by the same argument I don't at all mind giving some of this money—plenty of it, if you like—to their victims in the dole queues. I'm on their side, if I'm on anybody's side—which I doubt. I'm more than ready to help you help them. But can't we help them by sending buckets of money down that way?'

'No, we can't,' said Berl. 'One must go oneself and live among them.'

'Well, I'm certainly not doing that. I'm never going back into *that*. The old Commercial Road has seen the last of Martin Herriot. But, Berl, be sensible. I can't bear the thought of losing you altogether. Helga, I must like him much better than I thought. And I'm sure our darling Helga feels the same.'

'Oh, yes, yes!' Helga's voice was low, so deep her conviction.

'Couldn't you perhaps give half your time to them and half to us?'

'No. That is not at all what I want to do. I seem to see that one must have done with class and wealth and live among them as one of them, sharing all things with them. I don't want to be a visitor among them, from the other side of London.' Saying this, Berl hoped that the words sprang more from his desire to serve than from his desire to escape—but he did not know: he knew only that both motives were active in his heart.

'Well, Helga, what are we to do? There's nothing altruistic about our little shop, and Berl's always believed in benevolence.'

'Benevolence?' Berl took the word for a walk about the room. 'I don't think it's a question of benevolence. In Hagen Street we were always ready to share with a neighbour in trouble. It's a natural feeling. And now I can share rather more with them than ever before; that's all.'

'All right, Berl; if you feel it's your duty—'

'Duty? Duty?' Berl seemed to find this no prettier a word; he walked about with it. 'I don't think I want to do it as a duty; I want to do it as a joy.'

'I understand, Berl,' said Helga. 'I'm sure I understand.' Again her eyes tethered to his—and he recoiling from the admiration in them; thinking, despite his words' fine spirituality, 'I don't want your admiration, I want your love. I don't want your spirit only, I want your body too . . . '

'Well, Berl, all I can say is, I have more money coming in than I know what to do with. It's getting a damned nuisance. You can have wads of it for your boys.'

'I have all I want, Martin, thanks to the absurd sums you've paid me and which I've never properly earned. But you remember that packet of shares you gave me?'

'Shares? Shares? What's he talking about, Helga? Oh, yes, I *do* remember something.'

' You must take them back.'

' I'll see you at the devil first.'

' But you gave them to me so that I could become a director.'

' Not a bit! I gave them to you for the fun of it.'

' But now I'm resigning and walking out on you.'

' Then you can walk out with them. And with my blessing. Sell them, I should: they'll fetch a fine price just now. Dig them down into the foundations of your Palace for Down-and-outs.'

' I don't like to take them.'

' My dear chap, do be sensible. In the first place, what good are they to me? In the second, when you start this wonderful work you'll certainly be asking for subscriptions from millionaires who've made their money in beer or tobacco or whisky. Well, my money's no worse than theirs. Those shares are my subscription, and don't dare ask me for any more for quite a long time. When do you want to go?'

' I suppose, as soon as you can release me.'

' Oh Helga, Helga, our Mr. Mickiewicz is off to better himself. I always had a feeling this would happen. These fellows with an excess of holiness in their souls! Thank God there's not a trace of it in Daniel Deakin, and no great shot of it in Helga, or I should be left entirely alone.'

' Berl, *must* you?' Helga pleaded. ' Please don't.'

But he turned from her voice and, shaking his head, went towards the door.

§

When Berl left his place in the Omar Galleries, and his home in Richmond he seemed to Martin and Helga to have passed for ever out of their lives. Apart from one letter, addressed to Martin only, telling them that he and his parents were now settled 'in a little house in Standy Street', they heard no more of him. Standy Street! Helga knew it well and described it to Martin: a long curved street linking Whitechapel Road to Commercial Road East. At the Whitechapel end there was a block of tall red houses with Dutch gables, but all the rest of the long road was terraces of little low houses like those in Hagen Street. Most of the houses were respectable enough, but some of the single rooms in the red block were known as the homes or resorts of criminals. And criminals, for the most part, from the ghettos

of Central Europe: Poles and Russians and Serbs. It was to this that Berl had returned.

Martin, listening to her, said, ‘ Well, there you are. Amazing race, these Yids. They can be the brightest scholars, the smartest criminals, or the finest saints. I ought to have seen from the first which way old Berl would go.’

At first Helga missed Berl very much—his absence, newly realized each morning, was a daily sorrow, but with the weeks and months she grew better of this heartache. She and Martin, so happy in each other, so merged and lost in each other, grew used to the absence of Berl. Often they said they’d ‘ go and look up old Berl in his squalor’, but they let the months pass and did not do so. At length Helga began to think Berl’s silence extraordinary, and she wrote him a merry letter insisting “ that he should straightway end it ”. He wrote a reply uncomfortably restrained in its affection, but giving her all his news. He had started his club, he said, but only in a small way at present. There had been no difficulty in getting members; the place was crowded every night; nor was there any difficulty about money, thanks to Martin chiefly; his one difficulty was to find helpers. But no doubt they’d come in time, and when he’d a band of helpers around him, he’d really get going. He’d a large capital lying at compound interest and ready to be used at the right moment; and it was by no means his own money only. He’d had a fine response to an appeal he’d addressed to ‘ all those who believed in the dignity of man, even in dirt and rags.’ Wealthy Jews had been the most generous subscribers. He had been allowed to make his appeal in several West London synagogues, and the results had been beyond anything he’d imagined. It was wonderful, wrote Berl, how seldom these opulent and be-diamonded Jews failed you, if you but used the words of their own prophets and asked their help in ‘ raising up the poor out of the dust and the beggar from the dunghill, to set them among princes.’ And wonderful the magic and power of words.

Helga was astonished that the very sight of his writing, and the affection in his letter, and the picture it gave of him, could fill her with so much pleasure and recreate in a moment all her love for him. That old love stood upon its feet again, full grown. One might go further and say that the bones of the slain, like those in Ezekiel’s valley, stood upon their feet, an exceeding great army. And this army was eager to march off, there and

then, to Stepney, to see this club of Berl's. And as she thought this, she was seized by a most pleasing, exciting, and, yes, flattering idea. *She* would be one of his helpers. She, Helga Lindgren. She could never do what he could do; never give up all her life to the poor in the dust and the beggar on the dunghill; but surely she could give up one night or two nights a week. Never happy about her apostasy from her parents' ideals, she would be happier if she felt she was doing something good: something for somebody else. And all the boys in the club would love her. Highly charged by this idea, she set off one evening for Standy Street, quite anxious to see it and its sister streets again; and above all to see Berl's home and his delight and gratitude when she offered him her help.

59 Standy Street. A door and a window, and two windows above, and a basement lit by a grating; but all beautifully clean—as indeed were many of the houses in this street of dubious fame.

Mrs. Mickiewicz opened to her; Mrs. Mickiewicz, now an old fat lady, with white hair making blacker than ever her rich, kind eyes.

'Why! Helga, my dear! Come in. Why didn't you tell us you were coming? Berl would have so loved to see you. He's at his club. He's never away from it, you see. Most nights he's got no helpers at all.'

Helga went into the tiny passage and saw the narrow stairs before her: it might have been her own clean little home in Hagen Street. They went into the front parlour, and it was curious to see some of Martin's beautiful French pieces crowded into this small room. Mrs. Mickiewicz, sitting down with her fat hands on her knees, told Helga all that she asked. They were very happy here, she said; Dad was never really happy in that enormous house in Richmond; he had no real friends there; old Jews like Dad and herself were always happier among their own people. As for Berl, she was sure he'd never been so happy in his life. He was doing something he'd always wanted to do.

'And he still lives with you, of course?'

'Yes; in the little room at the back. It's just like old times.'

'What will you do if he marries?'

At this the old woman swung her eyes away from Helga's face—guiltily, like one with a secret. 'I doubt if he'll ever marry, my dear. I could wish he would. But in any case he won't be living with us for ever. Directly he's built the big

institute he has in mind, he's determined to live in it, probably under the roof, somewhere.' She laughed. 'I'm not sure that a wife would be very keen on this arrangement. She'd have to be a good and self-sacrificing woman. She'd have to be as good as he is, and there are not many like that.'

'Where's the club now?'

'In Tasman Street. But they're dreadful premises, really: an old disused pub and the empty shop and house next door. And sometimes he's there all alone with no one to help him.'

'Tasman Street. I know that.' And indeed she did. The very name had an emanation of evil and fear around it, as have Chinatown and Pennyfields to those who do not know them. Tasman Street lay in an area which, in her childhood, her parents had forbidden her to approach. It led into Cable Street, with its brothels and gaming houses and dingy saloons for dark-skinned seamen. It was not far from Omar Square and that notorious Dyers Street of which Martin had told her. It was in Martin's country; in his 'native land', as he called it. Many a knifing had there been in the Cable Street area, and not a few murders, and many an assault on a girl child. In its side streets, so she used to hear, the people lived in stinking rooms, in conditions foul and sub-human; and Tasman Street was one of these. But all this was in the old days; this ill-famed area was almost respectable now and safe enough. She was not at all afraid to go there; nor was Mrs. Mickiewicz afraid to let her go. 'It's not like what it used to be, my dear. I should say there are quite as many bad lads in Standy Street as you'll find in Cable Street these days.'

So Helga went forth to Tasman Street. She walked there quickly, excited to see Berl again and his club and this once-evil street. Now she was in it, and very harmless 't looked, though narrow and dusty and grey. Rather dark too, where the flat grey buildings were tall and fronted each other across pavements and setts. There yonder must be the club, for that gas lantern, suspended from an ornamental bracket, must once have hung before the glazed front of a public house. Oh, not a doubt of it, for now she heard the din of young voices coming from every window of the pub and of the disused shop and house beside it: yelling voices, chattering voices, laughing voices, quarrelling voices. And as she came nearer she detected, like notes of percussion in a mass of orchestral sound, the clicking of

ping-pong balls, the banging of a piano, and occasional thumpings, as of wrestlers falling to the floor.

Coming to a door, still engraved 'Saloon Bar', she felt frightened, frustrated, beaten back by these high waves of sound, but she pressed the door open and instantly the noise was doubled. But it was not this that first hit her, nor was it the sight of a crowd of running, jostling lads in chokers and torn garments; it was the smell. The smell that now beat upon her was worse than that which assaults you as you enter a monkey-house, because it was a human reek. It was a conglomerate reek; to its making went the smells of old body-sweat, of filthy feet; of standing excrement. And, added to this human reek, a stale smell of cats came from the stairs or the yard behind. Sharply nauseated, she felt her stomach turn over and feared she was going to be sick. Her impulse was to retreat, shutting the door at once on noise and smell, but at that minute she saw Berl standing behind the counter—once the counter of a saloon bar. So small he was she had not seen him before, because most of the lads around the counter were taller than he. In the same minute a youth yelled out cheerfully, 'Lidy at the door, Mr. Mucky Wits. Lidy come to see yer;' and Berl looked up from his tea-urn and cakes and recognized her.

'Helga!' he cried, and she had to go forward into that fog of fetid air. And as she went forward she knew that her pretty idea of helping Berl had been finally suffocated by the fetor, if it hadn't already been crushed to death by the crowding, shattering noise.

Though the noise had quietened a little as the lads stopped their riot to look at her and stood to watch her passage through them. Undisciplined lads and lewd, they loosed wolf-whistles in appraisal of her beauty; they smacked their lips in the same appreciation; and they made sibilant sounds in imitation of succulent kisses. They asked, loud enough for her to hear, because they wanted the laughter of their mates, 'Hah jer like that?' and 'Strike me, but that'd be nice for supper, wouldn't it?' And their mates answered them, 'H'm, yes. I could do with that,' and 'Oh, yes, *please*!' Others addressed her, 'Hallo, Gorgeous,' and 'What are you doing tonight, miss?'

More boys rushed in from the shop next door, through a new doorway in the party wall, having heard that 'a lady who was a fair knock-out' had come in to see Mr. Mickiewicz. And

they invoked Holy Moses and Holy Smoke, as they stood and gazed at her. One exclaimed, 'Well, I'll be topped!' And another: 'Shouldn't allow 'em aht, when they're like that. It's bad for us boys.'

'Helga!' Berl had abandoned his urn, dived under the counter's flap (not difficult for one so small) and was pushing through the thronging boys to greet her. The boys stood around to see and savour this reunion.

'Helga, my *dear*!' He seized both her hands, kissed her first on both cheeks, then finally and fervently on the mouth.

'Gaw God alive!' exclaimed a boy at their side.

'Hey, mister!' called a lanky youth with pimpled face who stood behind the others but was elongated enough to see over their heads. 'Give us lads at the back a chance.'

'I'll lay he enjoyed that,' said another, who had studied the kiss seriously. And he nodded to himself, with conviction, as he thought further on the matter.

'Yeah. Scrumptious!' agreed his neighbour, with his hands playing in his pockets. 'Right smack on her kisser.'

'Never 'uv thought Mr. Berl had it in him,' said a third, scratching his chin as he recalled the phenomenon. 'Right smack on the blasted kisser.'

'Some people have all the luck,' said a little thirteen-year-old sadly.

'Helga, tell me everything about everybody. How's Martin? How's old Daniel? How are all the boys and girls at the Galleries?'

She replied with a question of her own. 'Berl—my sweet Berl—where *have* you got to now?'

He swung a hand towards the audience. 'You see,' he said with a smile.

'And you are liking it?'

'*Liking* it? I love it. Never enjoyed anything so much in my life. I think I only began to be really happy when I started this game.'

'Oh, don't say that! You were a little happy with Martin and me. Why is this so much better?'

'Oh, I don't know. I suppose it's because one is creating something—or hopes one is.'

The boys, discerning that this was going to be something of a 'pi-jaw', withdrew from interest and returned to their rioting and wrestling and games. The noise was now as loud as ever,

battering at the head, tearing at the nerves. And Helga asked 'But how can you stand this frightful pandemonium, and this——' she drew up distasteful nostrils to show what she meant.

'One doesn't notice the smell after one's been in it five minutes. It's like bathing in a cold sea; you've just got to plunge in and get it over; and, anyhow, it's quite extraordinary the powers of endurance that seem to be set free when you begin to act according to a faith that is in you. Doors seem to fly open, and difficulties to melt away. My only trouble is helpers. I've only two or three at present, and they can only come once or twice a week. But others'll come; they'll come, I know. They just *do* come in the end.'

But Helga kept silence. She could not make an offer of help. She felt sad in her silence. She looked at Berl, so small, and struggling alone with this mob of hooligans; she thought, Oh if only, if only she were strong enough to come and work at his side two, three, four nights a week—but it was impossible. Impossible. One couldn't do the impossible. Never could she endure this noise in her ears, this stench in her nostrils, these sores and boils before her eyes. All that she was aching to do now was to get away from this place, from Berl and this sea of trouble in which he was struggling to float, but she did not want him to see that she was running away, so she set her lips tight against the stench and stayed with him for a half-hour, going with him from room to room (in each of which the stench seemed to greet her anew)—from ping-pong room to billiards room and boxing room; touched by his enthusiasm for this, his creation, and pining, straining, all the time to get away. At last she got away—got away into the clean cold air of Tasman Street—and immense was the relief as she left behind her the last of that smell and walked away from all that rowdy roughhousing that had beat on the head and rasped on the nerves. Relief, yes, but sadness too, and shame.

§

Ashamed, she wrote to him no more: visited him no more. She kept away from him as one keeps away from one's conscience. She strove to forget that night in Tasman Street, and her weak and selfish retreat.

And the more the fleet-foot days went speeding by, the more easily did she and Martin forget Berl, seldom speaking of him any more. He faded from memory.

He fades out from the picture of their life for seven years.

Helga passed her thirtieth birthday, her thirty-first and thirty-second; and she was still no more than Martin's mistress in a luxury flat, with every gift and every delight lavished upon her—except marriage. Not once did he suggest that they should marry, and so far, though she had often hinted that she'd like to be married, she had not dared to insist upon it. For if ever he discussed marriage as a subject for argument, he always condemned it as a slavery to which he, for one, would never submit.

But Helga's roots were in Hagen Street where a girl, if not married by twenty-one, feared lest she were passed by; and not only in Hagen Street but in one of its homes which was a religious household. She, unmarried and a mistress, might keep at a far distance her memory of her childhood's home with her strict, kind parents, and of her Sunday School with its lady teachers, and of the church in Jamaica Street where there was a vicar whom she'd adored; but she could not keep away—no, not for two hours in a single day—her ever increasing horror of the thought that probably she would never be married.

And now that this hurrying, unhalting Time had carried her into her thirties another thought came and sat like an intermittent ache in her heart. If Martin spoke seldom of marriage he spoke never at all of children. Her own desire for children had not troubled her in her first years with Martin because she'd ministered to it with a vague, easy-going hope that one day 'all would come all right' and she and Martin would marry and have their children like ordinary people. But now this likelihood seemed to be dead, and its grey ghost would rise from its grave to walk at her side, haunting her. The fear that she would never have children had become, of a sudden, an obsession. She could not see a baby in a pram without pain. Of course she sometimes, when in Martin's arms and taking his kisses, spoke of this longing; but he would only answer, laughing, that he'd not in the least mind giving her a child—that he'd love to if it'd please her—but that he'd not yield on the question of marriage. Let them have a child, or children, in open defiance of that tyrannous institution. Other courageous people had done so. And the more people did so, the better.

One day marriage with its impossible and therefore futile compulsions would be a thing of the past: let them be of that day now; let them walk, a man unashamed with his mistress, and a woman proud of her freedom. Look at the kings and the dictators and the men of great power. Had they not always done this? Look at the famous women who'd demanded and demonstrated their right to bear a child to the man of their choice. If Helga had a courage worthy of him she would do this.

But Helga, child of Hagen Street, had no such courage; and meantime, as you see, Martin had put himself among the kings.

§

My friends, you must understand Martin now. The collision of wills is upon us, and the wreck.

In the company of others he could be merry to the point of buffoonery; in solitude he could be melancholy to the point of hypochondria. I suspect that some such hypochondria waits always for those who have given themselves wholly to selfishness and who at an early age achieve all. What then remains for them but futility and dejection and the doldrums? Martin had won more wealth than the most covetous man could want; it continued to pour in upon him automatically; and, sated with it, the appetite had sickened and died. At first he had felt a delight in gathering in the money, but now the excess of it bore upon him like a burden. He had enjoyed getting his teeth into the outer pith of the apple; very sweet and juicy it had tasted; but now he had come to the worm within.

This joy taken from him—or, rather, turned into a tedium—he had Helga only for a sweetness in his life, and of course, after ten years, this mutual love had none of its pristine ecstasy. It was still the only thing that had a face of pleasure for him, but the face was veiled in the drapings of the commonplace.

Sometimes, and especially in the melancholy hour of twilight, his disillusion and depression were so overwhelming that he would rush from his high flat into the Park opposite that he might walk and walk there, away from confining rooms which, no matter how beautiful their furniture, shut him in with hateful thoughts. In those days you might have seen him walking alone across the vast lawns, head down and feet slow, or standing quite still in some pool of lamplight, while he wrestled with some devil of despair.

In those days the devil of Insomnia was a frequent guest in his high flat, getting into his bed with him and sharing it for most of the night. Then throughout the small hours, pitch dark and pale grey, while the Deakins and all the rest of the world slept, terrible would be the clarity with which he saw that his life was now empty of purpose, empty of worth. To Helga he was used to say, ‘ I only came alive when I finally gave up worrying about what the world called good and devoted myself to what was good for me; ’ but so much of what was good for him then had now turned bad. He would turn in his bed and, thinking of those who had died—his father, Auntie Vera, that millionaire customer yesterday—would find himself envying them their oblivion and rest. He would find it quite pleasing, a sweet medicine, to play again (as he used to at nineteen when the world had cast him out) with thoughts of suicide. He felt no less of a castaway now—but now ‘ t was his own hatred of the world which had exiled him from it. Turning over in the sleepless bed, he would think, ‘ There is no more happiness, and I am ready to die. Helga alone holds me to life—and she only just does it. If Helga were to die I should be more than ready to follow her and to sleep. In death at least one can sleep.’

§

It was now, and for the first time, that he turned to other women. Hitherto, preoccupied with the pursuit of money and power, he had been as little interested in other women as in making friends and in feasting and drinking with them. But now in his weariness he began to seek all such diversions as his wealth would buy; and in his arrogance he suddenly decided that, as one of the world’s ‘ great men ’ he was entitled to everything they enjoyed. He would look around and take it. *Le Roi s’amuse.*

Let it be clear that these other women were as nothing compared with Helga. Helga was his other half, his wife for all time; these his occasional concubines of whom he rapidly wearied. They were nothing to him but a physical indulgence and a proof of power. He took them far more as a duty to his greatness than as a vice to which he was addicted.

Naturally he hoped to hide these encounters from Helga, but if this should prove impossible, well, she must just accept them. She must realize that she was lucky to be a great man’s

one real love and, conscious of this good fortune, must bear with anything her great man chose to do. Had not all wives of great princes been obliged to play this part?

Wives? But she was not his wife. Sometimes he wondered whether to appease her likely wrath by making her his wife—but no! this he would not do; his revulsion from the idea of marriage was almost as obsessional as Helga's longing for children. It amounted to this: never, never would he allow the world to deprive him of his triumph in getting Helga on his own terms. The world should not, by forcing him into marriage, have its sly laugh at him in the end. It was he who should dictate in this matter; not the world.

§

But in this last arrogance he demanded too much of Helga; he tried her too far. Or, as the Greeks might have said, he was guilty at last of that imperious pride, that hubris, which the gods will not suffer in a man, and whereby they are provoked to destroy him.

There was indeed a haughtiness in Helga which, till now, he had not hurt and quickened.

Be sure that rumours of his adventures were soon abroad and her suspicions soon alight—suspicions that were really knowledge. At first she tried to tell herself, and a woman who was her confidante, that, since she knew she was the only woman he really cared for, she didn't mind if he wanted to play the fool with others; but she knew that she was only saying this to save her pride. She had heard other women say it, and always she had suspected that they said it only to save their pride. And it had been easier for them to say it, because they were safely married, with their husbands tied to them. That she was unmarried, and thus only 'one among many' of Martin's paramours, became a thought that racked her daily; and more so when she learned that one of his women was a child of eighteen. And she was thirty-three; nearly thirty-four. Her lease of beauty was nearly expired.

Less painful than this child's age, but painful too, was the fact that she had a title: *Lady Moira*. Helga came from Stepney.

Jealousy was now a greater torment in Helga's mind than her fears for the future or the frustration of her desire for children—

which, in her present agonies, she had forgotten. One night the agonies, mounting, changed into a wild conviction that someone was with him—that this eighteen-year-old was with him; and quickly a desperate desire to know if this was so led to a wild deed. It was after ten o'clock, but what matter? One must know. She rushed from her flat and, summoning a taxi, drove through the brilliant London night to Martin's flat, seated all the way with a taut, breath-breaking suspense and a heart-sickening fear. And yet this fear was almost a hope that she would find them there—find him with his titled baby, because this would mean the end of suspense, and a dreadful triumph.

At his flat door, as she waited for it to open, her fear and excitement were almost pleasurable. This heavy, handsome door so firmly shut before her! In a few seconds it would open to disclose what?

To begin with, it disclosed only Maisie Deakin in her dressing gown, her ample body loosed and lax and ready for bed.

'Why, Helga, my dear! Law, you give me a fright. This time o' night, and me alone up here at the top of the house. I was just off to bed without waiting for Daniel. But whatever is it at this time o' night? Come in, dear.'

'Did you say everyone was out?' The words enshrined a relief at first; then a disappointment, since they meant she would learn nothing; her frantic rush to this place had reached only a blind wall.

'That's right. Martin's at the theatre and Daniel's at the Arms where he's always going now, given half a chance. Once Martin's gone off, Daniel nips out. But, goodness, how pale you look! Why, you're shaking! Is anything the matter? Come and I'll give you a nice stiff drink.'

They went into Martin's drawing room, and the first thing Helga observed was a decanter, glasses, and sandwiches on a small table.

'Sit down on that there sofa, dearie, and I'll mix you one. I'll have a little one too, meself. I generally prefer a bit o' port meself, but this whisky's a rare pick-me-up if you're down.' She poured two whisky-and-sodas into two of the glasses. 'I'll just use these glasses now. Lovely glasses, aren't they? I can easily get two others for them.'

For them?

'"For them", did you say?' Helga began, but Maisie,

bringing the glass to her, did not hear. ‘There! Have that. You look as you ought to be in bed. Oh, law! One of them vases isn’t the same distance from the clock as the other. That’ll upset Martin if he sees it, and he won’t be happy till he’s told Daniel or I about it. He’s got terribly nervy about things like that. A reg’lar disease, I call it.’ On the chimney-piece was a Sèvres clock in *bleu-du-roi* porcelain with a painted face and painted plaques. Twin vases, matching it, stood on either side. It was a set like the one Martin had given to Helga. Maisie went and adjusted the relations of the vases to the clock, and returned to her glass and to Helga. ‘Has something upset you, dear?’

‘No, no . . . I’m all right . . . I just wanted to ask Martin something. I didn’t know he was going to the theatre. He never said anything to me about it this afternoon.’

‘Didn’t he?’ Maisie didn’t look at Helga as she said this; she looked down on the floor. Standing there, she kept silence; then sipped from her glass.

‘Has he just. . . .’ Helga stuttered and stopped. ‘Has he just gone alone?’

‘No . . . no, not alone. He’s taken that silly giggling thing, Lady Moira, with him.’

Along with the stab of pain came the irrelevant preception that Maisie was impressed by the girl’s title. The stab was so deep that Helga only just saved herself from muttering aloud ‘Oh God! . . . God! . . .’ She shut her lips tight upon this betrayal, and then managed to ask with some naturalness, ‘Lady Moira? How do you know this? Are you sure?’

‘Why, goodness, yes! He made no secret of it. She was here to dinner.’

‘And are they—are they coming back here afterwards?’

‘Well, yes. Yes, they are. O’ course they are. He told us to put out them sandwiches, but not to wait up for them.’

‘Oh, I see. . . .’

But here her strength snapped, and she could not stop the uprush of tears. Instantly Maisie was at her side on the sofa and laying a consoling palm on Helga’s two hands folded on her lap. ‘No, Helga lovey, don’t cry. No, no, there, darling! It’s a shame, I know. But I’ll tell you one thing, lovey. It’s you only he loves. I’ll stake my gospel oath on that.’ Poor Maisie’s metaphors had gone to pieces in this access of sympathy. ‘These others don’t mean a thing to him.’

'Does she . . . am I right in thinking what I'm thinking?
You're here and you must know.'

'You mean, does she stay here with him?'

'Yes . . . yes, of course I do.'

'Well. . . .' Maisie's loyalty to all her sex, her indignation at the behaviour of most men, and probably some memories of Daniel astray—all these gave her sharp pleasure in uncovering the truth. 'Well, yes, she does, sometimes. No so often, but once or twice. I should be lying if I said she hadn't.'

'You said "these others". Are there then others?'

'Well . . . yes, I could tell you of one other, that Fairbright girl. Yes, she's been here more than once. But there: I think the fact that there's more than one of them should be a kind of comfort to you, sweet. That's why I'm telling you. It means he's only playing with them. But what a way to carry on! He never used to do anything like that. It was you only. Never no one but Helga. Mind you, I had to get used to the idea even of you, but Daniel said as how a man must be allowed to live his own life, and you and he were as good as married, if only Martin had believed in marriage. But when it came to these other hussies, and me being obliged to make their beds for them, I says to Daniel, I says, "I can't see as it's my duty to do this." But you know Daniel: he says, "It's not necessary for you to see. Nobody's asked you to see. All you got to do is to do what you're told." You see, Daniel's line always is that we'd be mugs to quarrel with our bread and butter. And it's a sight more than bread and butter here. It's just absurd, all the money Martin showers on Daniel and I. And he don't give it to keep us quiet, because he done it long before there was anything to keep quiet about—before even *you* come. It's just because he likes showering things on his friends, like. But you mustn't take this too much to heart. Shall I tell you what I think? I think he's gawn a little off his head with all his success. And that he now thinks he's above all the ordinary rules and morals, like; and, if you ask me, he's just kind of proving this to himself. Apart from that, these here baggages don't mean a thing to him. He'd sell 'em all up for you.'

'He'll have to. Or he'll see no more of me.'

Helga had uttered these words in a low voice, sitting very still and staring in front of her.

Maisie was a little frightened by them. 'What? Are you going to speak to him about it? You're never, are you?'

'I am. I am going to wait for him. Here and now.' Tears filled her eyes as she sat there, unmoving. 'I'll wait for them both. They should be back soon.' Her eyes turned to the Sèvres clock. 'It's ten to eleven now. They should be on their way home.'

'You'll talk to him *tonight*? Oh no, dearie, no. You mustn't do that. Please no.'

'But I will! I will!'

'Oh, no. Not tonight. He'll know that I told you. He'll guess it. He's terribly clever.'

'He needn't think anything of the sort. I'll let him think I knew beforehand and came here to welcome them both—to welcome them to the home that was mine. I want to see her face when she finds me waiting here.'

'Oh no, you mustn't do this. No, run home now, ducky. Oh dear, oh dear, I suppose I oughtn't to a' told you, really, but I kind of thought you ought to know. I done it for the best. But don't tell him I told you—ever. It'll cross him properly, and he don't like being crossed—just don't care for it at all. Not even Daniel cares to cross him nowadays. He, the great Mr. Herriot, thinks hisself much too big a saucepan for little tinnypots like Daniel and I to argue with him. I doubt if the Almighty Hisself is any less partial to being told He's wrong than Martin these days. He don't *say* much about what he's feeling but neither does the Almighty, come to that. But he can look black as thunder, so go now, darling, there's a dear—or he'll guess.'

Helga, I suspect, was glad of an excuse not have to fulfil her bold threat. Never, in spite of their mutual love, had she lost her fear of Martin; rather had it increased a little, as he rose higher and higher in fame, and power upon power was added to him. She must gather courage before she spoke to him. And what was more—though she would never, never, admit this—the Helga of Hagen Street was a little overawed by this young woman with her title. Oh, she would charge Martin with his treachery and throw down her challenge to him, but not at once—not just yet—not tonight.

So she pretended she was acceding, out of kindness, to Maisie's entreaty. She rose—quickly, because they might be here at any minute and she must escape; she must evade their eyes; Martin's eyes; that girl's eyes. 'All right, Maisie,' she said hurriedly. 'I'll wait till he comes to me. But I shall

speak then. I'm not going to be treated like this. No one's going to treat me like this; not even Martin—even if he does think he's king of the world.'

Maisie laid an encouraging hand upon her arm. 'That's right, my pet. I'm sure you're doing right to wait and talk to him quietly in your own—'

'Yes, yes, but let me go now. Let me go.' Helga had heard the ticking of the Sèvres clock, and thought in panic that its every tick was bringing them nearer. 'If I'm not going to wait, I must go.'

Maisie followed her hurrying figure to the door. 'That's right: you run along now, and I'm sure, I feel sure, that if you tell him you can't stand this sort of thing, he'll give over doing it. Mark my words, he'd rather lose all of 'em than you, any day. Of that I'm certain. And Daniel says so too. And we ain't lived with Martin all these years without knowing something about him.'

'Yes, yes, but let me go now.' Did the woman not understand that Martin and his woman might be in the street at any moment? On the stair? 'Goodbye, Maisie. Goodnight. I——' she ran down the stairs and out of the street before their eyes could fall on her.

§

And almost immediately after this, suddenly, before she could amass that courage to speak, Martin announced that he was going abroad on a buying tour. He must leave at once—in three days' time at least. He had private information of great pictures for sale. He was going to Paris and Berlin, he said, and, since he would be in Central Europe, to Munich and Leipzig and Vienna. Where else, he could not say. It might be that he would hear of pictures in Venice, Florence, Rome.

And Helga was glad of this sudden departure because she could postpone the uncomfortable and rather frightening task of charging him with infidelity and delivering an ultimatum. The more she had tried, in her flat, in the street, in bed, to build up the words for his humiliation and instruction, the more frightening the task had seemed. Not only was she afraid of his anger—he could say violent and wounding things, almost as if

he relished them—she was afraid also of frightening him away. Side by side with a proud woman's wish to punish him was a devoted woman's fear of losing him; and while the one cried, 'Forward,' the other cried 'Back. Few men can stomach a jealous woman.' With the result that she stayed, unmoving; she did not speak.

But clearly now, thanks be to Chance, she could postpone all speaking. She *must* postpone it. That was only sense. How could she speak when he was so busy with preparations? No, she must wait till he was home again. Yes, keep secret your haughty resolve as he keeps secret his proud conquests. Hide for a little while longer what you are thinking as he hides what he is doing. But you will speak when he returns. Immediately. Oh, yes. 'I *will* not be treated like this. For him to treat me like this just because I gave myself to him—I who might have had any man in those days! Everyone used to say at the Marcus Press that I would make some great marriage. But for him I might be married now with a husband and children; and beautiful children they might have been. No, no, no; either he'll give up these creatures, either he'll cease making me a laughing-stock or an object of pity among all who know us, or I'll go out of his life. I'll go. I'll find some way of living. I earned money once. I'll do anything rather than be treated like this. I'll die—die—rather than let anyone do this to me.'

§

And yet, despite these brave words, she yielded herself to his love-making till he was gone; a little sadly, perhaps; but saying nothing; even, lest she provoked the issue too soon, showing nothing, and returning his kisses, but telling herself, while she gave herself, 'I am going to speak. I am going to speak. This does not mean that I'm not going to speak . . . when he returns . . . when he asks this of me again.'

And while he was abroad, she saw in a French journal, which a woman in her club somewhat mischievously passed across to her with an invitation to look at page twelve, a picture of 'Mr. Martin Herriot, the world-famous art-dealer and philanthropist with a friend, on the sands at Le Touquet.' The friend was the Fairbright girl, whom Helga had more than once met, before Martin elevated her to her present position, and very attractive

she looked in her bath robe and two-piece bathing suit, lolling back in a deck chair, with her long legs crossed.

Then Helga's indignation, pride, and jealousy, boiling up into a super-heated stream, gave her such power to go forward, such a transcending of her fears, that now she only longed for his return and for the moment when she would speak. She counted the days till his return as a child counts the days before the school-term ends, or before a promised treat. She could settle to little but paced up and down her room and round about her flat, as a tigress paces round and round the limits of its cage, restlessly awaiting the moment when it will be fed.

So she struggled through the days of his absence till at last a change came over her love like the chill change in a summer's day when of a sudden it is pleasant no more but overcast and wintry. The long hours of loneliness, the lacerating pain of jealousy, the fierce-beating pulse of resentment, the sense of injustice, more bitter to the taste, and nearly as lethal to a life, as the seeds of strychnine—these too-wearing emotions began to erode her love away; to make it such a thing of pain that she could dream with pleasure of being quit of it. And then, as with Berl, her early upbringing seized upon this opportunity of her suffering, and spoke. It spoke with her in the daytime and the night-time, till she, like Berl, began to dream of some faith by which she could live, some new purity which might be sweet within, and some good which she might set her hands to do. She remembered Berl; she thought of his happiness now; and at last, seven years after that shameful retreat from the stench and uproar of his little club, driven by a sudden wild impulse, she ran in search of him.

§

She went to Standy Street, hoping that Berl's parents were still there; wondering if they were still alive. Mrs. Mickiewicz opened the door to her, and she seemed but little older, for her hair had been quite white when Helga last saw her, and always her fat kept her face round and smooth. She peered through gold spectacles, frowning at the woman on the threshold, and then flung out two welcoming hands. 'Helga! Helga, after all these years! Dad, who do you think it is? It's Helga Lindgren, and looking so beautiful! Come in, my dear. You're looking older but, do you know, it suits you. Come in and sit

down. Yours is a beauty that's improved with a little more character in the face. How lucky you are to have a beauty that gets better and better, and will last for ever.'

If Mrs. Mickiewicz seemed much the same as seven years ago, the little front parlour was exactly the same. It looked as if, reserved for best, it had not been entered in all the seven years. Mr. Mickiewicz came from his back parts, a little old smiling man, fantastically like his son, but rather less ugly than he used to be, because his hair, always thick, was cloud-white now and crowned the thick, heavy features with dignity.

'Is Berl still with you?' Helga asked, as they all sat down.

'Our Berl? Oh, no!' Mrs. Mickiewicz, sitting with her fat hands on her knees and staring at Helga, seemed to be thinking more of her visitor than of her words. 'He lives over his club as he always intended to. In three rooms, right at the very top. But of course we see a lot of him.'

Three rooms. 'Is he . . . is he married?' Helga was surprised at the fear with which she asked this question; in her present unhappiness she longed for Berl to love her only. 'He's married, I suppose?'

'No.' Mrs. Mickiewicz shook her head and looked somewhat whimsically at Helga. 'No.'

Great the relief. The cup of comforting love for which she had come would be full; not quaffed in part by another.

'And is the club still in Tasman Street?'

'Oh, dear me, no! It hasn't been there for years. It's a great place now. A most wonderful place. He spent enormous sums of money on it. How much was it, Dad?'

'Nearly a hundred thousand pounds,' supplied Mr. Mickiewicz, nodding proudly.

'Yes, he collected money from synagogues all over the country and from wealthy Jewish business men. They gave him all he asked.'

'Some gave thousands,' said the proud father.

'Yes, he went speaking everywhere, our Berl. He's become a wonderful speaker.'

'He has lots of members, I suppose?'

'Thousands.' Mrs. Mickiewicz left that grand word to say all.

'Thousands! What? All out-of-work boys?'

'Oh, no, it's long grown into something much bigger than that, though there are still plenty out-of-work boys among its

members. Any boys can join it after they leave school. And there's a girl's club attached to it too.'

'All Jews, are they?'

Mrs. Mickiewicz spread apart her fat hands. 'It's not limited to Jews, but, as it has worked out, the great majority are Jews.'

'And . . . has he helpers now?' asked Helga, her hesitant question stirring old lees of guilt. 'All he needs?'

Again the proud father supplied the answer. 'He has a list of over a hundred who come and help him whenever they can.'

'How splendid—but who are they?'

'Some are boys who were with him at the Tasman Street club where he started.' This was Mrs. Mickiewicz speaking; and she laughed at her next words. 'They are some of those whom he was able to tame. Maybe they are some of those you saw that night. Others are young gentlemen he's won over when he's gone to speak at his synagogues, and at the public schools and universities. He goes all over the country, speaking, our Berl. He's become a wonderful speaker now when he really warms up. He's quite as good as our rabbi, *I think*.'

'Oh, I must go and see this new place of his! Where is it now?'

'In Michal Street, just alongside Tasman Street. Still in the old Cable Street area. But there! the whole place is much better now than when we first came to London, isn't it, Dad? Why, I wouldn't have walked down there alone, at night, fifty years ago, for a hundred pounds. Attempts at murder were common enough then. But, lord, it's as safe now as the back-yard of the Old Bailey.'

'And as quiet as Sunday morning in the City,' laughed Mr. Mickiewicz. 'You'd never believe.'

'And will Berl be there this evening?'

Mrs. Mickiewicz looked up at the clock on the mantel. It was a Sèvres clock with two vases on guard at either side; the gift of Martin, of course. Such a clock and its attendant vases were like Martin's lordly imprint in the houses of his retainers and friends. 'If he's not there now, he'll be there soon. It's Friday, and the eve of the Sabbath, and he always has a Sabbath Eve talk with some of his boys. Our Sabbath begins, you know, as the sun goes down.'

'He regards his club as his family, you see,' explained little Mr. Mickiewicz, smiling gently, 'and the Master of the House

is supposed to talk with his children towards dusk on a Sabbath Eve.'

Helga glanced through the window into the long street where the children were playing as she used to play in Hagen Street. The shadows were long on pavement and camber, shadows of roof-lines and small distorted chimneys: soon the sun would be beneath the lowest of the houses. 'Oh, but look: it'll be dusk almost directly. I must go at once. I'm so longing to see him.'

They rose. 'And come again to us, my dear. Don't leave us another seven years. Come again soon.'

'Oh, I will, I will.'

She hurried towards Michal Street, but first, drawn as we all are by places we have known in the past, she went into Tasman Street to look at the old public house and the battered shop beside it. Both were derelict, their windows grimed where not broken, their doors locked and chalked on, the paint dark with dirt and cracked and flaking. One glass panel of the Saloon Bar doors was shattered into pointed shards, and she looked through the jagged cavity into the dead room. It was now a place of dust and splintered wood and fallen plaster. The old fixed counter, behind which Berl had stood serving his hooligans, was still there, rotting and damp and in parts stove in. Nothing else but silence. Even the smell of humanity was gone, because of the broken windows and the visiting winds. Only the reek of cats remained, coming from the yard or the broken stairs; but with that reek came, vividly, a re-creation of that night in the past.

Fascinated, she could not quickly take her eyes away. It was in this dead and forgotten place that Berl had sown the seed of a great achievement. Through this wrecked door she had run from him that night.

She came away at last with a sigh. Stepping on to the roadway, she looked up again at the lifeless and mouldering façades of tavern and shop; then sighed again and passed on, not lightly moved by thoughts of time and decay. Decay of house-walls where voices, laughter and friendship had been. Decay of all beauties whether of body or mind. Decay of love. Of passionate love. Thus went the order for all things. Leave it—leave the past. Now visit the present in neighbouring Michal Street; go and see what has come from the seed which died here that it might bring forth fruit.

She had but to turn into Michal Street to see Berl's club.

It dominated the street and the neighbourhood. Many stories high, all red brick and white stone dressings, with high arched windows on the first floor, it towered above the little houses and looked like a great school or a small hospital. More like a school perhaps, because it had a high-railed playground all round it. It rose like a red gabled mountain from a grey lake of asphalt.

Helga stood looking up at it. So this was Berl's creation. So different from the creation of that other boy, Berl's school-fellow and friend in the Stepney Streets: the Omar Galleries.

Entering, she was met by a pretty Jewish girl who told her that Mr. Berl was not in at present, but 'would she care to see Mr. Lehmann, the manager, who was in his office with Mrs. Lehmann?' She would, said Helga; and the girl led her ten steps along a corridor and, opening a door, announced, 'A young lady who says she's an old friend of Mr. Berl's.'

'Oh well, let her come in, *please*,' urged a young, pleasing voice.

Helga went in and saw a tall young man, dark and broadly built, and as palpably a Jew as Berl himself, but much better-looking and very much larger. He had risen from behind a desk. 'All friends of Berl's have the freedom of this joint,' he said. 'This is my wife, Ruth.'

Seated on the single leather chair near the desk, her hands full of documents, was a young woman whose face with its pale blue eyes, fair skin and short nose was as palpably Gentile as her husband's was Jewish. Hers was hardly a beautiful face, except in expression. This, Helga thought, was quite beautiful. She had never, she told herself, seen eyes that were so full of compassion and yet so serene. If no one had told her a word about this woman, she would have guessed that she had come out of suffering into a faith that was all in all to her. Something other than compassion looked out from those pale eyes; some knowledge of another country than ours, where there was no more sorrow nor crying, but all was peace. Helga, in her unhappiness and her search, felt an instant readiness to worship her. I have met this woman and can understand what Helga felt at first sight of her. I know her story. Strong in her maternal instinct, she lost her first baby at five weeks old, and because of some incompatibility in her husband's blood and her own, was forbidden ever to bear another child. For months she was but a vessel burning with misery; and now the eternal quietness seems to sit in her eyes. She plays no part in this story,

unless perhaps as a signpost to Helga, pointing a way she could go.

Soon these two, Robert and Ruth Lehmann, were telling Helga all about Berl, and it was clear that, whether or not Helga would worship Ruth, they certainly worshipped Berl. They couldn't stop talking about him, and they spoke as disciples of a master. All the world round about, they said, came to Berl for help in their troubles, and not the Jews only but the Christians and the Chinese and the Indians and the Blacks. No matter what the trouble was they believed that Mr. Mickiewicz at the Michal Street Institute would advise them aright and help them out of it. They told stories of women running to Berl when their boys had been arrested by the police, or their husbands had deserted them, or their landlords were threatening eviction, and how he would help them with advice and often engage a lawyer to fight their battle for them. They told of lads who were afraid to return to their homes after they'd come out of prison, or whose fathers had refused to have them back, and how Berl had gone ahead of them to their doors and done gentle but unremitting battle with the fathers on the doorstep and then bidden the boy enter his natural home. They told of a girl who had come to him when she was 'in trouble', declaring in terror that her father was going to turn her out, and how, like some Hebrew prophet of old, like Naaman to King David, Berl had gone to rebuke the parent, and said, 'If you can look me in the eyes and tell me that you've never done wrong to some other man's daughter, then cast your child out, and I will take her in. Because I cannot say that.'

There were tears in Helga's eyes as she listened. Strange, she thought, that tears could crowd into one's throat, not at some tale of death and loss but merely at the record of some compassionate or kindly action. She longed to do lovely deeds like these, supported by a faith like Berl's. She saw tonight, with a clear vision, that if she could do such things and believe such things, she would have rid herself at last of the strait-jacket of self which was tormenting her.

Then entered Berl himself, on quick steps, crying, 'Is it—is it Helga? Why, yes! Helga after seven years!' and before either knew what they were doing, they had flung arms around each other and were hugging each other and patting each other on the shoulder blades. Then Berl must show her all the wonders of his palace—its gymnasium, its theatre, its library, its synagogue,

its dance floor, and its kitchens—and at each she exclaimed, ‘But how wonderful, Berl! ’ and ‘Berl, how proud you must be,’ and ‘Oh, how I wish I had done something like this! I’ve never done anything at all except look after myself. Nobody’s ever mattered to me but Helga. I’ve been sitting there, listening to the Lehmanns, and trying to remember any really decent and wholly unselfish thing I’ve ever done, and, Berl dear, I couldn’t think of one! Oh Lord, I’m horrible. I can’t think why you ever liked me. I can’t think what you saw in me.’

‘ You were disgracefully beautiful: that was the main thing; and men, being fools, tend to forgive everything to such beauty as that. Not that it’s the least true, what you were saying. You were quite a nice child, really. But come on. Come quickly. There’s not much time. The chaps’ll be assembling for our Sabbath Eve talk.’

‘ You must be awfully happy,’ she said, as she followed, half a pace behind his hurrying steps.

‘ Happy? Yes, my dear. If only people *knew*—I sometimes think that the whole world is blind—blind to the happiness that’s waiting to be picked up. They don’t begin to live till they start forgetting themselves and doing this sort of thing. They’re all half dead, and don’t know it—can’t know it.’

‘ But I’m so afraid you’ll wear yourself out. You never spare yourself, they say.’

‘ Oh, well—“one crowded hour of glorious life”’ he quoted, hurrying on. ‘ Now come up and meet the children.’

Up and up they went, up and up from landing to landing, till they were on the top floor under the roof, and here he led her along a passage to his own room, a small and very untidy place, littered with papers and books, and hung all round with photographs of lads who’d been members of his club and were now soldiers or sailors in uniform (one was even a policeman) or just husbands in their best suits, each with a wife and some with a baby as well. There were portraits of girls too on the days when they were white brides with a bouquet in their hands and some be-buttonholed sawney at their side. All these pictures were inscribed with signatures and affectionate greetings to Berl.

On chairs, on the edges of tables, on cushions and on the ragged carpet sat a number of lads and young men, and one or two girls. Most were Jewish in feature and colouring, but not all. Robert Lehmann was there and Ruth Lehmann, with her

placid eyes, sitting with hands joined in rest on her lap. Robert Lehmann yielded his chair to Helga and took to the floor. Berl went to the armchair before his disorderly desk, which as the focus of the room was the most littered part of it. He sat down, coughed, and said some words which, as Helga was to learn, came from the Kiddush for Sabbath Evening. ‘And it was evening, and it was morning—the sixth day. And the heaven and the earth were finished and all their host . . . Blessed art thou, O Lord our God, King of the universe, who hast sanctified us by thy commandments and hast taken pleasure in us, and in love and favour hast given us thy holy sabbath. . . .’

Having made this ascription, he said immediately, ‘Now what are we going to talk about?’

The talk was about anything at first, and then about this lad’s problems and that one’s doubts. (The girls did not speak much.) Berl answered them one by one, fervently, because his convictions were warm. He gave no set address, but all his beliefs came pouring forth as answers to questions, and Helga, listening, recognized them as the things Mrs. Mickiewicz had taught the child Berl in her kitchen long ago: he spoke of the Mission of Israel, and of the proud responsibility of being a Jew in God’s world, and of the pure joy of service, if once you had cast aside all desire for praise or pay. Praise and pay were undoubtedly pleasant things, said Berl, and, if they came your way, well and good, but if not, if instead came ridicule or blame or persecution, why, well and good too, so long as you knew the work was good. So long as in the evening, when you rested, you could look back upon the day’s work and see that it was good, then nothing was there for tears ; nothing but well and fair.

Berl’s ludicrously ugly face, with its low brow, drooping thick nose, and pendent underlip, was radiant as he made these grand statements; it might have been an exaggerated picture, even a caricature, of Old Israel prophesying to the World.

All these, his willing disciples, listened with staring eyes, as he vowed that the only perfect ‘fun’ was to be done with all caution, all fear for one’s own safety, all anxiety about one’s happiness and health, and to hear instead the Eternal Summons to the heroic and the hazardous and the extravagant and the self-sacrificing. Self-forgetful service was indeed the only way to happiness and health. It opened the only door to the full life, and such fullness of life, one quickly found, was ecstasy. Not a religion in the world but knew this. The greatest of all

the titles of the Pope was not Supreme Pontiff, Vicar of God, Patriarch of the West, Sovereign of the Vatican City, but Servant of the Servants of God.

It was clear from their captivated eyes that they agreed. And Helga agreed. She agreed as perhaps only those who are in a prison of self-centred suffering, and seeking escape, can agree; with an agreement so full in her heart that her whole body was shaking; a little more, and she must sob.

Every man in the world, even the wickedest, Berl was maintaining, had an inkling of these truths. We could not avoid the gleam, however faint it might have become, because God, in his favour, had condemned us all to good. This was true of all men everywhere, even those abandoned to selfishness and evil, because all were condemned from the beginning and for ever to this desire for good. Nothing they did could ever wholly destroy this seed of divinity in them; it would lie there, biding its time, and it was possible that in some hour of great misery it would stir in its darkness, and come slowly into flower.

At the end, he said a prayer including the words, ‘God have mercy upon and help all tormented minds, and all in danger of sin;’ and then, half smiling, he spoke the benediction which his parents used to pronounce upon him on a Sabbath Eve. ‘God make thee as Ephraim and Manasseh’—this to the crowd of young men; and to the few girls: ‘God make thee as Sarah and Rebekah, Rachel and Leah.’

At the door Helga waited—waited till he could break from among the boys and girls who surrounded him, asking questions, discussing what he had said, or simply speaking about a secular plan for tomorrow. She was not shaking any more, but calm and quiet, and happy in a resolve. He came at last towards her and, as they walked into the silence of the passage, she said, ‘Berl, you know all about my life, don’t you?’

‘What about it, Helga?’

‘My life with Martin. You know we——’

‘Of course I do, my dear. I’ve known it for years now.’

‘Well, in spite of that, will you let me come and help you? I want to so. May I?’

‘Please come.’

‘And, Berl, I want to try and be different, but it’s going to be very difficult. I don’t know what to do, but I’ll do it. Will you help me?’

‘Of course, my dear.’

' You are right in everything you said. I know you are.'

' I know it too.'

' It all seems to me like something I've always known, really, but have tried not to know.'

' That is exactly what it seemed to me once.'

' And something that I've always really wanted.'

' Of course you have. We all do. All of us, always.'

' Oh, it's so wonderful to have found it.'

She went out into the lamplit darkness of Michal Street, and all things on which her eyes fell were different; they were the same as two hours ago but different. Everything was aglow with meaning; the gleam from a small untidy room lay over the world. It was as Berl had said: here in this street, two hours ago, she was only half alive; there had been nothing heroic or adventurous in her life; nothing but a lonely island of self; now she was rescued from that island; now she was at one with all the great movements of the world; now she was alive as a lover is alive, who knows he is in love. She was one of those who believed like Berl.

Berl's seduction of her was complete.

§

Martin stayed away a long time. Too long, if he was not to let Helga cut a way out of the gilded prison he had made for her. This delay, rooted in his now overweening vanity and self-confidence, was an error fatal in his life. *Qui va a la chasse, Perd sa place.* . . . Every afternoon and evening, while he was away, perhaps buying pictures, and perhaps not, Helga ran to Michal Street to act as one of Berl's hundred helpers. And the evening and the afternoon were the thirtieth day and the sixtieth and the ninetieth—till they made up three months. And in that three months something new was created.

Evening after evening she was dancing with these East London lads, and greatly in demand among them, because she was still, as they said, ' a fair knock-out'. She might be older than most of them, but they were London street lads, and Jewish lads, and old for their years. They rejoiced to fox-trot with her. Often in the afternoon, she served in the canteen or, at Berl's request, organized games for the local children in the playground, to draw them from under the traffic in their streets. In the mornings sometimes, at his request, she might take some frail old

lady to the Out Patients Department of a hospital, supporting her like a crutch all the way, or some child, whose mother was out at work, to doctor or dentist, promising him a treat or a present when his ordeal was over. She visited homes where there was sickness or need, and, though most of these were clean and decent, some housed the old suffocating stench, but now she had the power to walk, armed with love, straight into the choking air and endure it. Once she spent two days and a night in such a home, where a young man lay dying on a bed of rags.

She was serenely happy—so happy that in weak, lapsed, self-regarding moments, she found herself hoping that she would soon have a beautiful calm expression like that on the face of Ruth Lehmann.

Deeper and deeper she plunged into this life of Berl's creating; and her happiness was always heightened when Berl appeared from somewhere and worked with her, because she had made of him a refuge and a rock; and at last, on a Sabbath eve, which was also the eve of Martin's return, she stayed behind in his room, after his 'Friday talk', to discuss what she should do when Martin was home again. Seated on the floor by the fireplace, while Berl remained in his desk chair, she said, looking into the quiet embers, 'I shan't be able to come so often, and I'm so sorry. I've so loved it all.' Berl only nodded. Then there was the question of how, now that she believed Berl's creed instead of Martin's, she would be able to withdraw from an unlicensed love. Berl strove to help her with advice, and then, since this had something of the quality of a farewell evening, they fell to talking about *his* problems and his plans for the future. And, as he was speaking of building a Holiday Home for Jewish children who had never seen the country or the sea, she suddenly asked, 'Will you never marry?'

He looked at her with a tightly compressed smile. 'The girl I wanted to marry wouldn't have me.'

She rose from her place by the fire and walked to the window. Far below, as on the narrow floor of a chasm, she could see, but only partly hear, the children playing in Michal Street, as she and her friends used to play in Hagen Street. Without turning from the window, and still looking down, she said, 'Tell me: when you asked me to marry you, did you know about Martin and me?'

'No. Only that you loved each other. That was all. Fool that I was, nothing else had ever entered my head.'

'Were you terribly shocked when you learned the truth?'

'I was unhappy. Very unhappy.'

She turned from the window and leaned back on its sill.

'Would you have asked me if you'd known?'

Berl evaded a direct answer. He lifted up a document from his desk, as if he would begin sorting the papers there—then dropped it. 'It would have made no difference to my loving you,' he said at last; and added after a silence, 'But what hope should I have had? There'd have been no sense in asking you, because I'd have had no hope at all.'

Then it was that Helga, hardly aware of what she was saying, uttered two small words that precipitated the end of all this story. 'Not then', she said.

Berl stared at her, dumbfounded by the words. Could there be such a thing as an expanding bullet of joy, I should say that these little words were such a bullet within him—the expanding being one, not of agony, but of joyous, incredulous hope. 'Do you mean . . . Is it different now?'

She realized the significance of her two words and, perceiving how they had dazzled Berl, felt obliged in modesty to cover their brightness with a light veil. 'Oh, everything is different now. In lots of ways. Naturally.'

'Would you now . . . is it so different that . . . but no, it's impossible.'

He said no more, and after a time Helga asked, 'What is impossible?'

'Why, that you and I . . . Helga, would you marry me?'

They were staring at each other, speechless. Helga dropped her eyes from his stare. She left her window and walked this way and that with his question, just as long ago she had walked up and down, up and down, with the question, Was she in love with Martin Herriot. At last she stopped near his chair and, looking at him, said, 'I think I should love to.'

'Helga! What are you saying? Did you mean what you said? Did you even hear what you said?'

'Of course I did. But you can't want me now. Now that you know everything about me. I have been everything that's wrong in your eyes.'

'Helga, if you were to marry me I should think it the greatest honour that had ever been given to me.'

'Ah, it's sweet of you to say so. But it is not so. That is nonsense.'

'It is not nonsense. I don't begin to think myself worthy of anything so wonderful as you.'

'How can you talk so stupidly? Me—another man's mistress for nearly a dozen years? While *you*—'

'I am not better than you. Maybe I am not so good. You are good. I know you are.'

'Oh Berl, don't talk so ridiculously. You! Look at you, and look at me.'

'I am looking at you and seeing that you are good. Oh, I know you've done things that are wrong, but what you do is one thing; what you are is another. What you do is temporary and passing, what you are remains. As I look at you now, I can see nothing I want to blame.'

'But, Berl! . . . Oh, sometimes it's only women who talk sense. Not men. Don't just say nice things. Of course I'm to blame. I never believed it was right, what I was doing with Martin, but I went and did it . . . deliberately.'

'My dear child, let's talk of something else. Look at all you've been doing for me in these last months. Yesterday is dead. Today you are just a very beautiful creature, with little but goodness in your heart. That is how I see you. Why then should you think I'm lying when I say I doubt my worthiness of anything so beautiful and good.'

'Are you blaming Martin for everything?'

'Oh no.'

'Is he then perhaps sweet and good too?'

At this Berl rose from his chair and went to the fireplace. Putting a foot on the fender he looked down in thought. 'I can understand much of what he's done. Above all, I can understand what he has done with you. You are so beautiful, a man is hardly sane in your presence. You nearly drove me mad once. I ran like a madman from the knowledge that you and Martin . . . I couldn't bear the sight of you, or the thought of you, or the memory of you. Can you understand that everything I've created here is partly the outcome of a desire to escape from the pain of losing you? So wonderful it is to be just you with your beauty—and your sweetness! You helped me to create all this, just by being there somewhere, miles away from me, and by not being mine.'

'Oh Berl . . . Berl . . . you can't mean all this.'

'I do. I do mean it. And if you were with me now——'

'But after all these years so many people know about Martin

and me. I should injure your work if I became your wife. You'd be ashamed of me.'

'I should be the proudest man in the world.'

'No, Berl, I don't see how that could be.'

'And the happiest.'

'No, those are just pretty words.'

'My God, they are *not!* They're the truth.'

'But how could you trust me, knowing what I'd been?'

'I should have perfect trust in you.'

'But how? And why?'

'Because I've watched your suffering, my sweet, and one doesn't go back into hell.'

'Berl, are you really rather wonderful? Listen: in the last few years I've dreamed so often of marriage; sometimes I would dream of it in Martin's bed after he'd turned away from me to sleep. I had enjoyed his love but after it was over I was ashamed, and I used to dream of being married. You remember how when I was a child I used to dream of making some tremendous marriage; now I would only lie dreaming of some man who would say "I don't mind what you've done. I only want you as you are."'

Berl stretched out a hand and gathered up her fingers, while she went on, 'Sometimes, of course, remembering how you'd once asked me to marry you, I would dream that it was you.'

'And the dream was right.'

'I used to think it a hopeless one, you being so good and so occupied with a great religious work, but . . . it's exactly what's happened. Is life much stranger than we think? Here it is, all happening.'

'I used to indulge myself with pretty dreams too. I used to dream of you coming to me and saying, "I am tired of this life. Please will you marry me, Berl?"' And I think you've come.'

'Yes. Yes, I have, Berl.'

'But, Helga darling, how can you be content with me after Martin? He is wealthy and very handsome. I live like a poor man, and I—I am so small . . . and ugly.'

'Berl, you said you'd be proud of me. I should be proud of you, who've done such wonderful things.'

'And you are ready to come and live in these unlovely streets? Won't you find them dingy and dreary and depressing?'

'I am ready to come and live wherever you are. That is all that matters to me now. If one loves, surely the only dreary and.

depressing places are where one's husband isn't. I think I'm going to love it here. And, oh my dear, I'll try to be a good wife to you. I will—with all my heart.'

'There's one great obstacle. We are forgetting it.'

'You mean?'

'Martin. Poor, poor Martin. . . . There is Martin.'

'I know, I know.'

'He has given you so much. And whatever his faults, he's always been madly in love with you. That I know. How will he take this?'

'Very terribly, I'm afraid.'

'Does he suspect anything? That you've ceased to love him, and that you now—may I put it so?—are beginning to love me?'

'Suspect? No. I don't think he's even capable of imagining it.'

'Have you any idea what he'll say? And do?'

'None whatever. Except that it'll be terrible.'

'Is he given to jealousy?'

'How should I know? All I can say is that I'm afraid he'll be *madly* jealous. And suffer horribly. I know what jealousy can be. Oh Berl, I don't want to hurt him too much.'

'Shall I go and tell him?'

'No. It's my task. But I'm frightened. I'm frightened when I think of it.'

'Well, think that all things pass. Think that in a little while all will be over.'

'But you don't think, Berl, that he'll—I remember you once said that he was a man capable of anything—he wouldn't think of killing himself, would he?'

'He would not. Put that idea out of your head.'

'But he's often said that his life wouldn't be worth living if he lost me and that he'd end it—only jokingly of course, because he's never really believed such a thing could happen.'

'We all say things like that sometimes. It's just words, words.'

'Berl, I'm afraid. He's such a lonely man.'

'Only because he's always wanted to be. It's his nature to want to be alone.'

'Yes, but with me there. With me available whenever he wants me. Without me, I feel he'd be too dreadfully alone. It's a terrible thing to be quite alone. Oh, I've an awful hour in front of me.'

'Helga, let me go and tell him.'

'No. I must go.'

In part she wanted to go. She was far as yet from Berl's power of complete forgiveness and, however afraid of Martin she might be, her haughty resentment at his treatment of her was demanding its right to be heard and seen of him. She would be gentle with him, but he must hear the price of his unfaithfulness. And the triumph of Berl's faithfulness. She could see the disharmony between this desire for a revenge and her new desire for goodness, but she could not abandon it entirely; she could only temper it a little. 'Oh dear, oh dear,' she said, 'I must try to be very gentle with him, but he'll never understand. Still, I must just face it. I must meet him tomorrow. Pray that nothing awful will happen.'

§

Martin was returning home. As he sat alone in a first-class compartment of the Boat Train, he could not read his papers or his books because his brain was alight with happy anticipation. He was thinking of Helga and of the joy of taking her after all these months away. He sat alone in the compartment because he had long since sent home the little companion pictured with him on the Le Touquet sands; he had left her that he might travel from capital to capital in Europe, whenever he heard of great pictures for sale. He had done good business, excellent business; and this was a pleasing memory, but it was not this that was exciting him now. He had long passed out of that country where a profit, even of many thousands, could excite him. Only the thought of Helga in his arms could be a tingling thirst in his throat.

But it was less his body that thirsted for her than his heart. Martin had always been too preoccupied with his stratagems and schemes, he had lived too cerebral a life, to be ridden by his bodily appetites. He was longing now to embrace Helga and possess her, but more to get a mental ecstasy than a physical. Apart from his pleasure in doing battle with the world, she and her beauty were the only things between earth and sky that he loved. And today the love stood the higher for this long absence. It stood as high as first love, and it was a tingling joy to be coming home to her like this.

His pleasure increased as the train wormed along the curving

viaducts above the slums of South London. They with their low, grey terraced streets strung end to end and criss-crossing each other, as far as eye could see, under the milk-grey smoke of a myriad ill-matched chimneys, were exactly like those he had been born to, in Stepney, and about the great dock roads. And here was he, looking down upon them from the comfort of his millionaire's throne. He was but forty-two; yet all the things he had sought to do he had done; all that he had wanted, and more, he had won; and somehow, in his dreaming mind, Helga, who'd once been 'the loveliest child he'd ever seen', Helga whom in her ripe and golden perfection he had resolved to capture for himself, was a symbol of all this.

He had telegraphed to her the time of his coming, and she would be waiting for him at the barrier—more lovely than any other welcoming woman there.

The train wormed slowly in.

Yes, there she was; and he hastened with a lift of the hand and a trembling smile towards her. Her answering smile was gentle. And when he came up with her and embraced her, saying, 'Hallo, darling,' her response was but a formal acceptance of his kisses, but this did not disturb him at all; nor did he find anything ironic in her only words, 'Have you enjoyed yourself abroad?' What more could she do or say in this public and crowded place?

In his car, all the way to Park Gate Terrace, he held her hand, sometimes patting it as if it were a possession temporarily lost and now recovered. And all the way it was he who talked, telling her of amusing experiences in this place and that place, while she listened quietly. Among all the millions in the London streets then there was no happier than he.

Then they were up in his room, in that gilded chamber where he had first received her years ago, and he was lifting her coat from her shoulders with the courtesy of a new lover. And then at last he had her in his arms and was kissing her many times. She said nothing, and he interpreted her silence as pleasure beyond speech. After this embrace he picked up her hand very lightly to lead her, as so often before, to that room across the passage where the great picture of the Admiral's daughter looked down upon the bed.

But she held herself back and gently extracted her hand.
'No, Martin. No, dear,' she said.

This denial of herself, after all his happy imaginings in the

train, was a disappointment so unexpected that it was like the collapse of a dream into dust.

'What?' he stuttered. 'What do you mean?'

'I have something to tell you, Martin.'

He tried to pick up her hand again. 'It can wait. Let it wait.'

'No.' This time she drew her hand away a little impatiently and the sharp action angered him, who did not like to have his will opposed. 'What is the matter with you?' he demanded. 'Why are you behaving like this?'

They were now standing opposite each other like duellists who measure their foils. And because he waited for her to speak, she said, 'Martin, I . . . this life of ours must end.'

'End?' It was the only word he could utter. He was as stunned as if, in the middle of a highway, an unseen vehicle had struck against him, dazing him.

'Yes, it's . . . it's over between us, Martin.'

'It is not! It is not! Over? What do you mean? I won't let it be. Helga. . . .' He stretched out a hand inviting her to come to him. 'Helga, my dearest. . . .'

But she only shook her head. 'It is over, Martin.'

'No, no—Helga!—you are mine. Don't talk of anything so impossible. You can't drag yourself from me; you are part of me. It would be death.' He stepped forward and tried to gather her to his breast again. 'You can't do this to me. You can't kill me.'

Hands on his breast, she pressed him away. 'No. No—please—I have finished with all that.'

'You mean that we are never—never again to——'

'Yes.'

'But why? Why not? What in the Devil's name has happened that you are talking like this?'

'I don't wish to. I can't. And I—I *will* not. I can't bear this kind of life any more.'

'You want to go from me?'

'Yes.'

'I will never let you go. You have always been mine. Helga, we love each other; we are part of each other. You are mine. Mine only.'

'Not any more.'

'Don't say such things! It maddens me. What have I failed you in? I have always given you love.'

'I want more than love.'

'What more? Tell me. I can give you anything. And I will.'

'You cannot give me the life I want. That is the last thing you can do.'

After staring at her like one stupefied he murmured angrily, 'There's nothing I cannot do,' and, turning away, began to pace the carpet, as if she were no longer standing there. What was he to do? How avert this mortal loss? It couldn't happen; it wouldn't. Oh no, it was only some sudden womanish caprice. What new growth, what absurd little cancer, was aching in her now? Ah . . . was it that old matter of marriage? Marriage: he'd forgotten the existence of such a thing; and he stood still, to renew acquaintance with it. Must he offer her marriage? But this would be a surrender; the surrender of a stronghold that he had fortified to be his symbol of—if he could hardly remember what. And he was not one who surrendered. But . . . 'But if Helga . . . if this alone will hold her. . . . Without Helga I do not want to live.'

Thus it was a battle between his pride and his need. And great was the resistance of his pride. For a long time there was silence in that room, while the contest swayed. And at last it came to this: that the wound to his pride would be a great pain, but the loss of Helga would be a pain unbearable. Well, then, yes: he'd have to yield. Pausing in front of her and looking at her, he gave his pride a lasting wound. In a kind of sick, sad anger he said, 'Is it that we are not married? Is it this rubbish of marriage that is troubling you?'

'No,' she said; but he was not listening to her answer.

'Because, if so, let us get married, and be done with it. Let us marry tomorrow.'

'It is not that, Martin.'

'You want children? Is that it? If so, let's have them. Have twenty.'

'That is not the main thing, Martin.'

'Then, in the sight of the Devil, what is it?'

'I don't love you any more.'

If there was a moment in Martin's life when all went down in ruin, this was it.

'Helga, please don't say such things. What madness is this? You do love me. You know you do.'

'Not in that way any more.'

'Why? Oh, what are we saying? Why, Helga? Why not?'

'Need you ask?' With these words her desire to punish him leapt into command. 'Do you think I haven't known all about your Lady Moiras and the girls who sit with you at Le Touquet?—girls twenty years younger than yourself? Do you suppose I've been blind all this time? Why do you imagine I should submit to this? Do you really think I am the kind who will be content to be one of many? Or the one who's being slowly deposed?'

'Good God, Helga! You know you are not one of many. You know you are the only one who matters a damn to me. You know it perfectly well. I may have played with others now and again, and—' here his pride whispered to him, You are not one who accepts rebukes; and in the heat of this thought he said unwisely—'and I may as well tell you that I have every intention of going on doing so. I do what I want to do, without correction from anyone.'

And this of course gave Helga over to her wrath. Disdain flung up her head and lifted her breast; she put a look of proud contempt into her eyes; and her voice shook with anger as she said, 'Then you can do it without me.'

'Very good,' he said, pride meeting pride. 'I will.'

'You may—so far as I am concerned. It matters nothing to me—nothing to me any more.'

'Thank you for your consent. It is pleasant to have it, but it was not indispensable.'

'So you have made very plain.'

'I order my own life.'

'And I too.'

'Very well. So let it be. Now everyone is satisfied.'

For he would not surrender again. Or so he thought as he spoke all these wild words. But—oh, God, God!—he pressed his closed fist against his brow—life without Helga was death. He must give in. Let him save his self-conceit, or some parts of it, by thinking, 'Ah, well . . . sometimes one must humour a woman. They are difficult creatures, and one must humour them.' Let him speak more gently to her and if necessary, cast a little of his pride away. 'Helga—*please*—we are both talking in anger and wildly. Forget what I have just said, and let me say this instead: you are making mountains out of mole-hills. These creatures have meant nothing to me.'

'They have meant everything to me.'

'No, you're just trying to make a tragedy of it. Can't you understand that a man can do this sort of thing, even while he knows that there's only one woman in the world for him?'

'If that is so, then I can only say that women are different.'

'Oh, but Helga—now—we must not part—we cannot part. I love you far too dearly to allow this to happen. I will not allow it to come between us. Look; I will give them all up cheerfully for you. You have beaten me, I confess.' And he attempted a smile—such a smile as, I imagine, was on the face of Napoleon when he said similar words to Madame Sans Gêne. 'You are the only person who has ever beaten me, but I surrender. I will promise you never to see anyone of these women again—ever.'

'That would be no use.'

'No use?'

'No, because it is all too late.'

'Too late? Why?'

'Because I don't love you any more, and I am marrying someone else.'

'What? No! No, no, NO! Helga my own!'

'Yes, he asked me yesterday,' she said, proud in her triumph and more than ready to scourge him further, 'and I promised him.'

'Who? Who is it?'

'Berl.'

'Berl? Berl? But this is impossible. This is ridiculous. What are we all saying?' He put the fist against his brow again. 'Oh God, am I mad? Are you really saying this? That you love Berl?'

'I think I have always loved him a little. Now I love him in a very great way.'

'You are not in love with Berl. You are imagining it. He is a good fellow, but you can have nothing in common with him.'

'I have everything in common with him. Everything now.'

'Now? Why is "now" different from yesterday? One does not change one's whole nature in a month or two.'

'I don't think I have changed. I have only learned to see what Berl sees. He has taught me everything . . . while you've been away.'

He refused to show that he felt the whip in these words. 'Indeed? Has he? You must be an apt pupil.'

'I am. Yes, I am, I think. I now love all he does and all he believes in.'

'And what, pray, is that?' He tried to be cynical, but it was like trying to be cynical on one's death-bed.

'You know well enough; he's told us more than once: goodness and unselfishness and attempting some service of others. You are clever, Martin, but Berl's really a thousand times cleverer than you because he sees a thousand things you can't see.'

Goodness—unselfishness—service of others—all the things he'd elected to despise and defy. So! She had gone over to the enemy.

'I so love it all that I'm trying to do it with him. I go every day and help him, and I shall continue doing so. I'm happier with him than I've ever been in my life. I never knew what real happiness was before. And now I want to be with him always and work with him always.'

Martin, hearing this, saw that it was true by the light in her eyes. The knowledge was a physical sickness: an actual nausea. He had to stagger to a chair and sit down, very still. 'Where are you going to live? In his slums?'

'Yes. And I'm so looking forward to it. I'm longing to go.'

The sickness increased. 'I am sorry . . . I feel ill,' he said.

She hurried to him. 'Martin, what can I do for you? You are as white as death.'

'That may well be. I feel like death.'

'Oh, let me get you something.' Now she felt a remorse like that of a parent who has slapped her child too hard. 'Shall I get you some brandy?'

'No. No. Let me alone. And go, go—no, wait.' One question he must ask, but he feared to frame it, so did he dread the answer. But it must be asked; she had given herself so quickly, so easily to him, all those years ago; it must be asked. 'Have you already given yourself to Berl?'

'No. Berl is not like that.'

As she said this, the nausea slightly settled. The words seemed to give him a respite in which he could act. And act he would to save himself from a pain beyond bearing. Act he would, no matter how violently. Aye, and however darkly. How he would act he did not know. He must think this out. Let her go—go—that he might think. 'Go, I said; go. I want to be alone. I've got to get used to this. It is not a little thing with which you greet me on my return.'

‘I am sorry, Martin. I—

‘It is like death to me, and nothing less. I have loved you, if I have loved no one else in the world. I have known this sometimes in the small hours of the night when I could not sleep. Often I’ve felt then that I’d like to die and sleep for ever, and I’ve told myself that I had every right to close my life at the hour of my own choosing, but then I’ve remembered you and known I couldn’t do it, not only because I couldn’t leave you, but because I couldn’t give you pain. You’re the only person in the world whose happiness I have counted as more important than my own. Now go . . . please.’

‘But Martin, oh, I’m sorry, if I——’

‘Go, go!’ he commanded furiously. ‘Oh, I’m mad, I think. Get out . . . Go to Berl . . . Oh, God . . . God . . . God . . .’

This command, shouted loud, overthrew her pity and her fear, and left only anger. Disdain threw up her head again, and she walked from the room.

§

He, seated sickly in his chair, watching her go out through the door in her scorn, seeing that the room was now empty, and thinking that it would be empty of her for ever, knew that extreme of loneliness which a man may not apprehend without despair. He sat alone with this dead despair, hardly moving, hardly able to think. That the world could end in a moment! That all the vast fabric of desire could lie about him in ruins. Farewell, ambition, for evermore. Farewell, all interest in the world, all desire to live.

How willingly he would die. But not leaving Helga to be Berl’s. ‘No! That I will not have. I will not let this be. If it’s the last thing I do I’ll put an end to this.’

‘Berl is not like that.’ Oh, the comfort of those words: they promised him a little time in which to act—in which to stay the course of things before the insufferable happened. But how? How did one stay a tide of life that was running high?

§

He sat there, hardly moving; thinking, yes, but with thoughts in such disarray that his head was like a shaken vessel in which all the ingredients were rising and falling and drifting and

clouding. The only clear and certain thought was the cry of his pain, ‘No! No!’

This turning of Helga towards Berl had inflated and inflamed his love into a passion more poignant than at any other moment of his life; and his anguish now, as he sat unmoving, staring ahead, clenching his nails into his palms—sat among his treasures in a room emptied of the past, emptied of the future, emptied of hope—was beyond anything Helga, in her jealousy, had suffered. She was going towards love; love was going away from him. It was gone.

Strange that he could feel no hatred for Berl. He could not begin to hate Berl. All his thoughts beat about Helga, and would not stray from her. Berl was but a name. That any man, Berl or another, should have and enjoy Helga was the thought he could not bear, the thing he would not suffer.

He could ease the pain only by saying repeatedly, ‘I will not let it happen.’ Or varying this by stating quite simply, calmly, and with pride in his purpose, ‘I have not the least intention of letting him have her.’ For perhaps an hour he sat there, saying ‘I will not let it happen,’ or varying it: ‘If I don’t have her, no one else shall. That is certain.’ ‘I do not stand by and see this done.’ ‘She was my prize: no man takes her from me.’ ‘Helga, my beloved . . . no man has her.’ ‘Has her to enjoy for ever—no! No! Fall heaven or hell, but I stop this. They don’t know *me*.’

‘And here,’ he thought, ‘is an extraordinary thing. If her answer to my question, “Have you already given yourself to him?” had been “Yes”, then this agony would be less, for the unbearable thing would have been done. There would not be this agonizing need to prevent it.’ The deep wound would have been given, and he but suffering the after-effects of it; it would even be in the way of healing; he would be free of this imperious need. After that answer, “Yes”, he would not have thought Othello’s duty his—to kill his bedmate for her unfaithfulness—but now—now his task was to kill her, if need were, before any Cassio could take and use her as he alone had done.

To kill her? The word had spoken itself, and he did not seem at all afraid of it, at this first sight. Would he then kill her rather than let this happen? Would he?

Sitting there, heedless of time, he leaned forward that he might peer into this not unwelcome thought. A window of this high room was open to the summer evening, and dimly he heard,

far below, the sound of the aloof traffic in the parkside road: the purring and hooting of cars taking city men home, the clop-clopping of horses dragging their laden drays, the steps of people on the pavements hurrying homeward, and the voices of paper-sellers shouting some late and exciting news.

A killing perhaps?

Oh, they called it 'evil' to kill, but what did he care for that? Had he not once, after the world had spurned him, said he'd cheerfully embrace what the weak and the timid and the tamed called evil, if so only he could reach his goals? And with this for his creed and rule of life he had conquered everywhere. But now the world threatened to rend one of his conquests from him, far and away the most precious of his conquests, and would he weaken in the face of this threat? Was he going to admit defeat? Were they daring him to a deed in the confident hope that he'd be too timid and conforming to do it? Perhaps they didn't know their man.

His eye fell upon a whitish grease-stain upon the lapel of his coat. He scraped it away with a finger-nail; scraped at it till it was gone; because he could not think again till no trace of it was there.

Tamely surrender? Already he'd stood in the suppliant's attitude more than he cared to do—in that offer of marriage; in that promise to be done with all pleasures that offended her. 'I offered you this. I offer no more. Maybe you'd have been wise to deal with me when I was in the mood to deal. I am done with offers.'

So he talked in his secret heart; for at all costs he must preserve his vision of himself as one who yielded his conquests to none. Grandiose words formed on his lips. 'Yes, I think I'm equal to this little controversy with God or Fate or the World. I have stated my final resolve. I have no intention of letting any man have her.'

But wait: to kill rather than admit defeat? Was he perhaps mad, was his brain unseated, he asked himself, dropping his head upon his hand. He, Martin Herriot, once that little frightened boy in Omar Square, to be esteeming himself above all law and quietly contemplating murder. Or was he really growing as big as this? Big enough to kill, when necessary, as all the great men of history had never hesitated to do?

He doubted it, for the little Omar Square boy was still somewhere deep down in his heart, but what other course was there?

Let Berl—oh, *no, no!* In all this tossed tumult of thought one certainty rode the storm always unwrecked: that another man should enjoy Helga, that she should get delight from him, was something he could not bear and would not bear.

The room darkened around him. The traffic was less in the streets. Men were home from their work. Sometimes he heard, and did not hear, the voices of Daniel and Maisie Deakin in the kitchen at the passage end. They were having an evening meal untroubled about him, because he had telegraphed this morning that he'd be out tonight—out with Helga! They were placidly eating and talking, unaware that there were thoughts of death in a neighbouring room.

'But to kill, to destroy that beautiful young life! To annul in one second all her bright promise! To snatch from her some forty, fifty, years! To snap her off like a flower which one crushes in one's hand and treads into the ground!'

His head shook of its own will. No, he couldn't push himself so far as to kill Helga. Kill anyone else, perhaps; but not Helga. He did not think he was afraid to kill; it was not fear that would stop him; it was pity; pity for that child at play in Hagen Street, that golden child; pity for that beautiful young creature who one day, not so long ago, had come down the stairs of the Marcus Press to greet him.

Remembering her as she was that day, he heard his lips say, 'No, I could not do it,' but equally, they said, 'I'll never let another have her. Never, never that. I could not live with that.'

And the more he thought of that lovely child in the street, whom he'd chosen for himself, the more he thought, 'I'll never give her to another. Never that.' Never that. He said it with every cell of his mind and body. He said it with a fist clenched upon the words as if to hold them as a vow.

Then in some way he must act. But in what way? How keep her from all others unless he killed her? Ah, but there was a third course, and one from which he could feel hardly any recoil. Aye, a third way that was almost a sweet way. Yes, yes, he could do it this way. He was almost at peace again, as he leaned forward sharply, and joined his hands to consider it. Let him concede that he was not big enough, not pitiless enough, to kill the creature he loved above all, and stay alive: it was a relief to be done with too much bigness. Then this way remained. In this way no other man would have her ever: he only—to the end.

Bent forward, hands clasped between his knees, he brooded and brooded. What cared he to live? Life without Helga—Helga to return to at the end of the day—Helga to walk with him in beautiful places, to share with him his every enthusiasm and every care—was not such as he chose to accept. And it was not God or Chance who would determine when he should say ‘Enough’. He had long been a little tired of it all and oddly liable to a faint envy of those who had died. With no belief that there was meaning or worth in human life; convinced that all one’s dreams and struggles and victories ended in a dark blackness of nothing, why continue the nonsense of living? This very thought that he was not by any means big enough to kill and stay alive, though it had relieved him from some strain, was another small weight in this dead mass of disillusionment. He felt like an artist who’d tried always to believe himself a genius but must admit at last that he was something less. ‘But if I am not big enough for that, I am quite big enough for this. And it solves all. I do not want to live in a world without Helga. And I do not give her to another. For my part I have done all I wanted to do; I have known the top of success; and the battle can end now.’

Worn with thought, he rose at last from his chair, unsteadily, and walked into the bedroom to which Helga had refused to come. And the first thing he saw was a thing he had forgotten: the great painting of Admiral Rattibon’s daughter. That child’s face shot an agony into his heart. He stood looking at it while the pain ached. And he said ‘Yes’ to his thought. And again, ‘Yes’. And he felt some pride that he was big enough to say ‘Yes’ to such a thought.

§

‘Am I wrong,’ asked Dr. Shelley, breaking into his story, ‘in likening this blend of arrogance and hypochondria, which so often darkens the minds of those who have achieved vast power in the world, to that mental confusion which afflicts a mountain climber who has ascended above a safety line into the unoxygenated air? At any rate, that is a figure which will appeal, I think, to you mountaineers.’

§

Having said this, and no one answering, Dr. Shelley went on: Martin stood waiting for Helga in the great terminus. He stood by the barrier of No. 10 platform from which the trains started for Sungbourne and the sea. What he was thinking now he hardly knew because his thoughts were a welter over which his numbed will had no control and desired no control. Why he was here at the barrier, watching the hurrying travellers on a late August afternoon, he hardly knew, for he could not swear that he had resolved to do the desperate thing. All he knew was that, if he allowed his imagination to show him Helga in the arms of another, and never his any more, the picture was like a bludgeon-blow on the brain, leaving him stricken. Not much of the Great Man, the World Conqueror, he thought, miserably but sardonically, in this stricken, confused, and drifting creature. And yet, strucken though he might feel in the brain, he had been capable of careful scheming and skilful dissembling. Never had he given more thought to the part he must play, nor played it better. And yet never had the rôle and the real man been more at odds. The actor himself had been deep in misery, but the part he had played before Helga had been one of acceptance, understanding, resignation, and a readiness to give her to Berl and to remain friends with both. ‘All I ask,’ he had said, ‘is one last brief time together; a few days, say, at Sungbourne where we’ve been so often before, and been so happy. You are Berl’s now, and we cannot go as husband and wife, I know, but we can go as friends. Berl won’t mind, will he? You will come? You will give me this?’

How his heart had beaten as he awaited her answer! Beaten—why? In dread? In hope? No, surely not hope—and yet wanting it to be ‘Yes’. And not wholly in dread, because even if she said ‘Yes’ he was not certain that he was going to do the terrible thing. And her answer had been, ‘Of course I’ll come. Berl won’t mind. He says I must do everything you want. He said I was to go on loving you, and I do.’ And at that word ‘love’ how awful had been the blending of his thoughts: an ache of love, an agony of loss, a shameful sense of guilt. He had replied gently, ‘Yes, Berl is a good fellow.’

But was he going to do it? Was he really big enough to do it? What but the event could tell? As he stood by the barrier, looking through the flurry and scurry of people for the figure of Helga, he wondered how it would be if some man passing near him were capable of apprehending his present thoughts. How

such a man would stand and stare at him. What assurance had one that one's thoughts, if passionate or painful enough, could not be transmitted to some other mind? Were there not innumerable records of a man at the point of death transmitting, presumably by the potency of his last thoughts, an apparition of himself to parent, wife, or friend? And suppose one were thinking, with some torment, not only of the death that was coming to oneself but of the death one had a mind to bring to another? Here was death twice over in a man's thoughts—and was it not possible that such thoughts, barely supportable, could break the walls of one's brain and fly to another's? To Berl's far away? Or to Helga's when she came?

Sufficiently disturbing, this idea, to make him walk from the barrier, restlessly; and to keep him walking, back and forth, slowly—past the hurrying, anxious people with their strained faces, past the complacent, unanxious porters with their rattling trolleys, past the scampering children, past the lovers who had just met and were greeting each other with kisses. Sometimes he stood quite still in the very midst of this shifting, dwindling, multiplying multitude, that he might try to see more clearly the conflict within him—and no one in the multitude knew what he was thinking. On the one side stood his indomitable (or would-be) indomitable refusal to give her up ('I have not the least intention of letting him have her'), his refusal to accept the consciousness of defeat, his need to believe himself unafraid and big enough for abnormal deeds, and his hatred of yielding, after all, to the 'good' which he had vowed to despise. Against all this stood his pity; not fear, not shame, but pity. Would it weaken him and stay his hand? But he *must* do it. He must do something—and this was all he could do.

But supposing he couldn't do it?

The conflict stood unresolved.

He drifted towards the Booking Hall and, seeing the flower shop within it, thought he would buy Helga some flowers; not cynically—God, no!—but as a true expression of love—and, besides, it would sort well with the rôle he was playing. Looking through the window of the shop he saw a mirror at the back and his face reflected in it, above the massed flowers. He was shocked at his face: it was white as meal, drawn with sadness and sunken and hollowed after nights without sleep. This was not the face of a conqueror; it was more like the mask of a broken man.

He bought a dozen red roses and came back to the swarming throngs about the barriers. And, oh God, he saw Helga among them, craning her neck, rising on her toes, as she looked this way and that for him. On the ground at her side was the handsome dark-blue dressing case that on her last birthday he had given her. But the sight of her there did not frighten him as much as he had feared, because his thoughts seemed almost paralysed now. His thoughts, but not his love: his love cried within him at the sight of her, ‘Oh, Helga . . . Helga. . . .’

Now she had seen him, and he put out a smile to welcome her. But could she only know the thoughts behind that smile, the half-determined plan! She took the hand he stretched out to her, but raised her eyebrows in some distress as she saw his face. ‘Oh, my dear!’ she said. ‘You look ill. You look pale as death. Are you not well? Oh, don’t look so sad. Please don’t.’

‘I’m not sad,’ he lied. ‘I have not been sleeping well; that’s all. This brief holiday will cure all that.’

‘I’m sure it will,’ she comforted him.

‘And here are some roses for you.’

‘Oh, how lovely! They are beautiful.’ The tears stood in her eyes to greet those roses. ‘Oh Martin, you are good.’

‘No, it was silly of me, perhaps, to have bought them. What a nuisance they’ll be to you all the way down in the train.’

‘I think it was sweet of you.’

‘Come,’ he said. ‘The train is not in yet, but the barrier is open.’ He picked up her hand to lead her towards the platforms, saying cheerfully, ‘Come along,’ but thinking, ‘I am leading her away from Berl and from every other man in the world. And, yes, I’m glad to be doing it.’ Then keeping hold of her hand, he said aloud, ‘I’m looking forward to this. We’re going to have one last happy time together. And at Sungbourne where we’ve often been so happy before. We’ll walk along the ridge of the downs and perhaps have a sail on the sea.’

‘Oh yes!’ She squeezed his hand in acknowledgment of his goodness. ‘And is old Andrew still there with his boats? Shall we get the very dinghy we’ve always had?’

‘I’ll wager Andrew is there. He’s been there thirty years and, as far as I can see, he is immortal. We’ll have our sail. For the last time.’

‘Yes, and the weather’s just perfect!’

He looked up at the sunlight shining through the acres of

glazed roof. Why did the weather aid and abet him like this?

'It is my part,' he thought, 'to appear gentle and affectionate with her, but that isn't going to be difficult. I feel gentle and loving and full of pity. So much so that I don't believe I shall be able to do it—but then what? Leave her to Berl?' He turned as they walked, and looked at her. 'No, that was impossible. Then the thing *must* be done. It must, must.' He had caught her eyes as he looked at her, and he saw what she was thinking. She was full of pity for him and saying to herself, 'I must be very kind to him, for he is the one who is losing everything.'

'You little know, Helga dear. It is Berl who is losing everything. I am taking you with me. I am keeping you for ever . . . or till the end.'

The train was not in, but they were allowed through the barrier on to the platform. And there they stood waiting. In silence. She holding her eyes away from him, somewhat uncomfortably. He beating his foot impatiently and thinking, 'Oh, why doesn't the train come?' But suddenly, while he was looking back along the way from the barrier, and wondering if he'd like to retrace it, she exclaimed happily, 'Here's the train!' And he turned to her voice, and saw the long train rounding a bend in the line.

§

'Come,' he said, and led her into a first-class carriage. They sat in opposite corner seats, and silence occupied the space between them. Martin wished that some other travellers would come into the carriage so that his thoughts, a too-concentrated essence, might be diluted; and, yes, that this presence of Helga, so oppressive in its solitariness, might be diluted too. Since it was still the holiday month and beautifully sunny, other people did get in—to his relief; and there were five persons in the carriage when the train moved slowly out.

It was hot in the carriage, for the sun was unveiled and shining through the windows with a fine holiday zest; and once or twice Martin breathed out heavily. His brows sweated and, drawing a handkerchief from the breast pocket of his jacket, he dabbed them. He had to do this many times. The palms of his hands sweated too, and he brushed them with the handkerchief. Now and then he talked to Helga, but for the most part he gazed out of the window at the endless streets that stretched

away for miles from this arcaded viaduct and this hammering train, till they were lost in the smoky vapours of the east.

Streets of poor homes on the flats by the river, they were almost the same as his native streets on the other bank: he could find an Omar Square among them, a Cable Street, a school like his own in St. Mary Lane, and Salvation Army hostels like the one in the Mile End Road. In many a backyard and from some upper windows, the washing drooped from lines or poles, untouched by the windless air. Dismal grey churches pointed their steeples unhopefully at the sky. On and on roared the train, and still the grey streets flanked it, though they were climbing hill-slopes now. But now the train was beginning to leave them behind, these slums of London.

He watched to see the last of them. Was he leaving them behind for ever?

The train was gathering speed. High speed for the coast. The metals of the neighbouring railway track ran beside him, shining in the sun, like water running straight to the sea. He had no fear that anyone would suspect that his act was deliberate. This did not begin to be one of his worries. In these gay holiday months accidents with sailing craft or rowing boats were frequent enough in places around Britain where people were making holiday by the sea. And at Sungbourne, of all crowded and merry-making places! Was it likely that such a deed would be done deliberately before two miles of hotel windows and vast throngs of pleasure seekers on beaches, esplanade, and piers? And his name and fame! So likely that a man, whose success in the world was a newspaper story, would seek his own death and another's in the bright noon sunlight and before a hundred thousand eyes!

Out of the window now he was not seeing the last grey suburbs but a dinghy overturned far out at sea, with a mast on the waves and a waterlogged sail. All too common with dinghies. Always one read of dinghies or other open boats capsizing or being overwhelmed because their inexpert occupants had ventured into seas too restive or too mischievous for them. The thing had happened to him once, when he was new to the game and inexpert. There had been an off-shore wind aft, and his sail was right out; the wind had shifted and, as the boom swung over, he had automatically and foolishly arrested it with his hand; the whole force of the wind had hit the mainsail and turned the boat over. . . . Or . . . one could sail into the

wind close-hauled and make the main sheet fast; then turn the little boat so that again the full force of the wind struck the taut-held sail. . . .

The child Helga, so long a prisoner within these miles of brick and slate, flagstones and lampposts, had seldom been to the sea in the years when one learned to swim. . . .

The child Helga. . . .

Helga, the woman. . . .

She had come with him perhaps nine times in a dozen years, but never had she achieved more than a few gasping strokes, even though he had tried laughingly and hard to teach her.

Was it well that he had failed? Well or ill?

The train had now shaken off the brickly, smoky slums, and he was looking down upon the little homes and gardens of simple, comfortable, unadventurous people—people so different from him who, from his train window, was considering their hollyhocks, sunflowers, and withering roses. How proud must some of these little men be of the dahlias, red and purple and gold, and their purple clematis twined over their cheap french windows. How little that woman, hanging out the morning's wash on a line between the apple trees, knew the thoughts and purpose (if purpose it was) of this man carried past her in a train.

He cast his eyes at Helga. She was reading one of the magazines he had bought for her. She felt his eyes on her and looked up and smiled.

The other people, boxed in with him for an hour: they too were reading, except the man in the corner, who slept, with his mouth fallen open.

Martin sighed.

Now the train had got them into the harvest fields—how heartily and heedlessly it sped towards the sea. Everywhere the wheat stood in shocks, and the shocks threw their shadows on the stubble. Here was a field of stubble from which the stooks had been carried, and its changing colours, as the train swept by, were gold and rose and mauve. Over yonder a plough was already at work, turning in the stubble to make rich the soil for next year's crop.

Next year. . . .

Autumn had brushed the hedges and trees so that their leaves were tired. Tribes of swallows and martins sat upon the eaves and roof of that old red farmhouse and, even as his eyes fell

upon them, they rose into the air and wheeled up and up to a great height, as if they sought a glimpse of the sea that was calling them.

He sighed as he watched them, and Helga, hearing the sigh, turned and watched them too.

Here were the downs whose ridges Helga had so loved to walk on; the downs with their hint that the journey was near its end, for this long, waving line of chalk hills was the wall between Weald and sea. Not long to consider their bare green slopes and blue-shadowed beauty, for with a loud whistle the train shot into the chalk. It issued from the reverberating, vibrating darkness, and the sunlight burst upon them. Helga exclaimed, ‘Oh, the very air seems different. One can smell the sea. Oh, how I love the sea. My room is facing the sea, you say, so that I can look at it all day?’

‘Yes,’ he said, and pretended to smile understandingly.

‘Oh, my dear, we will be happy together for a little,’ she said, and her eyes glistened and were wet. ‘You’re being so wonderful about it all.’

When they alighted from the train, it was at her fervid suggestion that they walked down the hill to the sea. ‘Let’s walk,’ she said. ‘Oh, I’d much rather walk. The air is so lovely. I want to drink it in.’

They found an outside-porter who would take their bags to their hotel; and with other holiday-makers streaming from the station, they went down the hill. They knew of old that this crowded road tilted in a bending line to the sea-front. A few hundred yards of it, and they had their first glimpse of the sea. They saw the blue horizon stretching like a bar across the mouth of the road, and Helga cried, ‘Why, it’s absolutely calm! I’ve never seen it so calm.’

They crossed the sea-front road and stood upon the esplanade with their hands on its railing and their eyes on the sea.

‘It’s like mother-o’-pearl,’ said Helga at last.

‘It’s certainly quite extraordinarily calm,’ Martin agreed.

‘Or is it opal that I mean? It has all the colours of an opal.’

So calm was it that its surface seemed of silk and each isolated bather spread encircling rings around him. Countless skiffs, propelled through the silk by lazy oars, moved like gondolas on a lagoon. Some way out beyond the pier head a square-rigged four-masted barque lay at anchor. She must be in ballast, Martin said, for her white-painted hull with its graceful lines,

stood high out of the water. In the windless air her flag drooped, and Martin, straining his eyes, pronounced it the white and blue flag of Finland.

'Isn't she lovely?' said Helga.

Oh, why did Chance help him like this? Why did it add this little weight to the swinging scale?

'If she's there in the morning we must go out and have a look at her,' he said. 'She's about a mile off shore, in about six fathoms, I should say. We could sail round her.'

'Oh, I'd love to.'

'But I hope there'll be a spot of wind. Otherwise we should have to row the dinghy out, in a calm like this.'

'Do you think we could get to her? Oh, we must. I didn't know there were any ships like that still at sea.'

'She's probably one of the old grain ships from Australia. I believe there are still a few of them carrying strange cargoes over the oceans. Or they're used for training ships. Perhaps this is one.'

In the farthest distance of all a streamer of smoke lay parallel with the horizon: it looked like the last farewell of some big liner or cargo ship. Slowly it dispersed into the unclouded sky. They watched it vanishing into formlessness and into nothing.

'And now we must go,' suggested Martin.

'Oh no. Not yet.' She did not want to turn from this tranquil seascape towards the noisy traffic on the sea-front road. 'The evening is too beautiful.'

It was after six now, and the sun was dropping towards the horizon. Soon it was low enough to give every ripple in the hard sands a shadow to nurse. These wet sands below the shingle were so bright that they reflected the bare-legged children at play upon them. So untroubled was the air that, despite the rattle and clatter of the traffic behind them and the voices of the many people walking along the promenade, they heard the laughter and shrieks of those far-away children and even the voices of rowers in the skiffs. Strange, but as the colours of the sea, beneath the falling sun, changed into turquoise and aquamarine, the horizon disappeared; you could distinguish no more between sea and sky. One of a number of gaff-rigged sloops, very far out, seemed to be sailing in the sky.

'It's as calm as a lake as far as you can see,' said Helga. 'Oh, I'd love to be on it. Look at those sailing boats. They must be miles out.'

'And there must be a breeze out there; they've got plenty of way on them.'

'How beautifully they move. I'd love to be in one.'

'Perhaps we can go in one in the morning.' He said it with a sigh. 'Or, rather, it won't be one quite like those. Those are real sailing sloops with expert hands to manage them. They must belong to some club. Old Andrew has nothing like those for hire.'

'Could we get out as far as they are, in one of Andrew's boats?'

'If the weather's kind. Yes, I think so.'

'You could manage it. You're wonderful with a boat.'

'I am nothing of the sort. I am only a small-boat sailor.'

'But still: if anyone can do it, you will. I have perfect trust in you.' In her enthusiasm she picked up his hand, and he wanted to draw it away, but did not, lest the action hurt her. He could not hurt her.

§

Martin came down the Grand Staircase of the hotel, crossed the pillared vestibule, and passed through the swing doors on to the terrace above the steps. Here, beneath the glass awning, he stood looking at the sea. A warm weariness ached around his eyes, and his body seemed empty of all but fatigue, for the night had been a long waste of sleeplessness. All through the night his tossing thoughts had been calmed for moments only by the word, 'Both . . .' The word had something of comfort in it. 'I can do it if both go. And oh, for my part, I am ready to go. I think I am looking forward to it. I am not afraid to do it; not afraid; I shall welcome it. . . .' But both? Could he do this? *Could* he? 'But I must. I must. . . . No man has her. . . . that is certain. . . . we go together. I take her with me. That is my answer.'

Much of the night he had lain with eyes open, looking into the dark. Sleep? 'Why sleep? It will only bring the morning nearer. Let the night be long. If only it would go on for ever!' If he did fall asleep for a while, it was the sleep of the condemned; a dark and stormy sleep, blasted with lightning-thoughts of the morning. Oh, the weariness of the night! But what need to worry about sleep any more, if one were done with this life in the morning? No need. Just lie and wait. Lie waiting. None

the less, the morning, coming grey, brought in its hands only the old envy of those who were dead and asleep. The sleeplessness had added its little to the willingness for death.

And now it was ten in the morning. Helga and he had breakfasted in their rooms, and so far he alone had come down the stairs and out on to the verandah'd terrace. The sun stared straight into his eyes as if to stress the brightness of the day. Its light spangled the sea and drained the beach of colour, substituting light instead.

‘Good morning, sir.’

By his side on the terrace stood the big handsome doorman in his brown and braided frock-coat, an admirable figure with a soldierly white moustache well set off by wind-ruddled cheeks. He was gazing less at the sea than at the cars and motor coaches streaming along the road between pavement and esplanade.

‘Good morning,’ said Martin. ‘Just as calm as yesterday.’

‘Not quite, sir. There’s a bit of a breeze about, and she’ll freshen later. The weather’ll break this afternoon or tonight.’

‘But it looks fine enough.’

‘Does it? Look yonder.’ He jerked a thumb towards a bank of smoke-grey cloud lying along the west, its ridges oddly flushed with yellow and pink. ‘That’s what’s coming to us.’

‘Then I’ll try to get some sailing while I can. I see the old barque is still anchored there.’

‘Aye, she’s the old Mikkeli, though she’s not all that old, really. She was built not above sixty years ago for the jute trade when there still seemed some future for deep water sailing; but after she’d done good service, they sold her to the Finns. A real old Cape Horner, she is. About three thousand tons. Big for a sailing ship.’

‘You seem to know all about her.’

‘Well, I’m an old sailor myself, you see, sir. I began in one like her when I was no more than sixteen. A fine ship she was—sailed for donkey’s years in the Australian grain trade. But she too was sold to the Finns and then went to a parcel of Portuguese for a fiddlin’ ten thousand pounds. I’m told she’s lying up now, breaking her heart in the harbour at Lourenco Marques. Because there’s nothing wrong with her; nothing wrong with the old ship. She’d go on sailing for ever if only they’d let her. So would the old Mikkeli yonder, but she’s had her day too. This is her last voyage. Being sailed away for scrap.’

‘It seems a shame. A noble ship like that.’

'Ah well, it's what we all come to, sir: everything on the earth and on the water. Time comes when the Almighty himself don't want us no more, and away we go for scrap. That's so, ain't it?' And he laughed.

Martin's eyes flew from this question. 'It's calm enough now.'

'Aye. Looks it,' agreed the porter, satirically. 'I give it three hours.'

The surface of the sea was so smooth and silken that the gulls seemed to enjoy floating on its breast, and here and there you could see the stagnant scum or a lacework of froth riding over the slight heaving swell. A mist had paled all its tints and veiled like a fine gauze the distant spaces beyond the old barque; but so far as Martin could see there were no sails in that diaphanous haze. Indeed the whole sea seemed empty of pleasure-craft at this early hour. Near in shore a boatman, languidly smoking a cigarette, stood in his boat, thrusting it forward, while the cigarette drooped. At intervals, when the noise of the traffic sank, one could hear the creaking of his oars in the rowlocks and the gentle plashing of their blades. This gentle sound directed the ear to other sounds from the sea: one heard the gulls complaining on the wing and the slothful waves fingering the beach and then receding with a sigh.

'Well, I'm hoping to go for a sail this morning and take a look at your Mikkeli,' said Martin. 'Think there's enough wind for it?'

'Aye, once you get out a little way. There's nearly always a breeze off shore. It's an off-shore wind now, and it'll take you out there all right. You're an old hand with a boat, I hope, or old Andrew'll never let you have a boat with a sail.'

'Oh, he knows me well. I've done plenty of small-boat sailing here.'

Saying which, he turned quickly into the vestibule, and immediately noticed a marine map hanging framed on the gilded wall by the Reception desk. He went to look at it. It was an old Admiralty chart made some hundred years ago by hydrographers long dead. It mapped a stretch of this southern coast with Sungbourne almost in the centre among its hills. Martin traced the track of the railway line by which they had approached and pierced the downs. The whole sea-surface was freckled with numbers—soundings in fathoms—and from these he judged that the Finnish barque must be anchored about

a mile out in some seven fathoms. Beyond her the sea deepened quickly to eight, sixteen, twenty fathoms.

He turned away from it with the sigh that now followed almost every thought. And as he turned he saw Helga coming down the Grand Staircase. She was dressed for a day on the beach or the sea : in a white frock with scarlet belt and collar. Hatless, she wore on her breast one of the red roses he had given her yesterday. She smiled to see him there, and as she came down the broadly carpeted treads, he remembered the first time she'd come to greet him, down the cold stone stairway of an East London Printing House. His heart nearly died within him at this thought, but there remained the wooden will to do his dream. He strengthened the will by repeating, 'I give her to none. I take her with me. That is my answer.'

'I'm all ready,' she said, brightly.

'Good. Then come . . . we'll go.'

'And the day looks lovely. Shall we be able to go out to the old sailing ship?'

Oh, why help me, why help me? 'The barque? Yes, if you'd like to.'

'Oh, yes, I want to. Yes, *please*.'

She was looking at him; and he knew she was thinking how pallid and strained was his face and attributing it to his grief. In her usual comforting fashion she picked up his hand and squeezed it compassionately.

They went forth together and walked eastwards along the esplanade. Martin, noticing everything of beauty as might a captive walking to execution, observed the many different colours of the sun-bright shelving beach: not fawn only, but apricot and violet, ochre and rose. He noticed too the driftwood and cork blocks and other flotsam washed in from the sea. They had to walk a mile past the high white glaring hotels, with their countless windows and striped sunblinds, to where the esplanade lost all its state and fashion and became no more than a railed sea-wall above the beach. Here one caught the tang of the beach: a smell of seaweed and fish and salty sodden wood. Here the whispering of the surge on the shingle visited his heart with terror. The low, slow voice of the sea . . . death's agent?

Was it to be so? There was Andrew at his station with his skiffs hauled up on to the beach and awaiting hire. There he was among his boats, an old lean, burnt-faced longshoreman in a blue jersey and sea-boots up to his thighs, and a peaked cap thrust

back on his thin grey hair. Many skiffs, but any dinghy there? Yes. Yes, there was one hauled up against the wall with its mast in place and its sail bent, ready for hoisting.

'Morning, Andrew.'

'Hallo, sir. Years since we seen you. Morning, lady.'

'Only one year, Andrew. We thought of going to have a look at the barque.'

Andrew turned an eye towards the barque. 'Aye, she's a beauty, ain't she? But she's on her last trip, they say: heading for the scrapyard. Okay, sir.' And he began to prepare a skiff for them, removing a dump of cushions from bows to stern.

'Oh, no,' Martin objected. 'I want your dinghy. We're going to do a spot of sailing.'

Andrew came erect, thrust the peaked cap further back, and scratched his head. 'Well . . . I suppose it'll be all right with you, sir.' He turned a screwed-up whimsical eye on Helga. 'Do you think I can trust him, lady?'

'Oh yes,' declared Helga. 'Yes, *please*.'

'Of course you can. You've often let me have it before. Good lord, I'm an old dinghy sailor.'

'Okay, sir. But I have to be careful who I let have her. You know how it is: they all think sailing's as easy as pushing a pram—until they're in the water with the sail on top of 'em.'

'Oh, *no*, but how awful!' laughed Helga.

'Aye, but it's likely enough, lady. And the next thing they know they've got their feet in the bows of a coffin and their head in the stern, and are sailing down the High Street.'

'Ah, but she'll be all right with me,' interposed Martin quickly. 'Besides we aren't going to do much. Just out to the Mikkeli and back. There's wind enough, isn't there?'

'Aye, you'll have all the wind you want, time you get out therc.'

'Fine.'

'Very well, sir. You can take her.'

So Andrew plays his part, thought Martin. Why does God do nothing to halt me? Why did He not make Andrew say No?

'Art, come and gi' us a lift. Never mind dreaming.' Andrew bawled this to a fair-haired young giant, his youngest son. In his blue jersey, with his trousers rolled up to his knees, the lad stood on the wet sand, arms akimbo and gazing out to sea. 'Come on, boy. Lor' bless you, that chap'll stand there for

hours, just staring at the sea or at a sailing ship, especially if she's a long-voyage square-rigger like that one out yonder. He fancies, I suppose, that he's sailing to America or Yokohama or Orinoco or somewhere in search of gold. Arthur, *come here*, can't you? No. Not a stir. Will you only look at that, lady and gentleman: the Boyhood of Raleigh! He's not on Sungbourne sands now; he's sailing away to the China Seas. *Arthur!* Never mind what the wild waves are saying; come and gi' me a hand. Ah, he's come awake . . . he's back in the land of the living. Hurry your stumps, lad; the sea'll stay there without your keeping an eye on it. You remember Mr. Herriot? He was here last year. Can't keep away from us. Now help us haul the dinghy down.'

Andrew, Arthur, and Martin, putting their weight on the boat, shoved and dragged her down the shelve of beach and into the water.

Drawing but a few inches, she was quickly afloat, and Andrew, wading, laid her alongside his little wooden jetty. Helga stepped in, Andrew helping her from his stance in the water. On Martin's instructions she sat in the stern seat on the starboard side. Martin seated himself on the middle thwart and placed an oar in the rowlock. Andrew gave the boat a last parting shove. 'There y're, sir. She's all yours. Be a bit careful if you sail to windward. Don't trim her too close.'

'I know, Andrew. I understand.'

'That's right, sir. Have a good time, lady. See that he keeps the old sea out of the boat.' He waved, turned, and left them.

Martin rowed the boat out a little way. 'Ah, now we've got a wind. We'll have her sailing. Let her come round, Helga. Yes, let go of the tiller altogether.' He gave a hard pull with his right hand, took his oars in, and, as the boat turned towards the wind, sent the sail up hand over hand. He squinted up to see that the peak was setting as it should; then, reaching for the tiller, he brought enough wind into the sail to keep it quiet.

'Keep her going just so,' he said. 'Hang on to the main-sheet. Haul in on the lee jib sheet once I've got the jib up. No, this is the one. Just get a pull on it. I'll make fast when the sail's up. Don't pull till I say.'

Andrew had hanked the jib on to the forestay. Martin had only to hoist away. The sail went up.

'Don't let it flog. Haul on the sheet now.'

The sail quietened, and Martin came aft, took the tiller and the main sheet, and bore away. The little boat heeled, and the quick noise of ripples sounded from under her forefoot. He paid out the main sheet and the boom swung over to the lee side. The boat stopped heeling and, almost on an even keel, shot forward like a gull.

'Ah, very sweet. She dances over the water. Nothing like running down wind—unless it's beating up against the wind. Yes, tacking against the wind's the real game. Then the wind's your opponent, and you need all your wits to play with him. It's feint and parry and thrust then—your skill against his strength. We'll do it in a minute.'

'Oh, *good!*' said Helga.

The dancing of the boat lulled them into silence. And in the silence he was thinking, 'One could capsize her, running before the wind. Hold the tiller to starboard too long so that she sheers round to port and the boom comes over with a tremendous gybe, catching something—your hand—on its way. But better, surer, sail close-hauled into a gusty wind and suddenly bring the wind abeam with the sheet held fast . . . yes, certain then . . . certain then.'

Yet all the time, as the boat ran towards the barque, he did not know whether he was going to do it; whether he had the courage to do it, whether the will, whether even the desire any more . . . but the alternative to doing it was unbearable, and so he must really want to do it. Yes, that wooden will to do it, hard and dead and insensitive, as if his brain were turned to timber, was still there beneath the moiling thoughts—or was it not? He did not know. Could one really believe it was there? The boat ran on, and the mind of one in it was far more tossed and beaten than the sea around. It was as if the tide ran one way and the wind another, and there was conflict between them.

The more effort you've put into the preparation of the deed, said the wind behind him, the more you need to do it. The further you have come, the less possible to turn and go back with nothing done. The faster and farther the boat goes, the more certainly you will have to do it. But death—death, said the sea in front—death given and taken? Not a little thing only a little way ahead of you . . . no, but better than life without her, better than the thought of another man enjoying her. I keep her. That is my answer.

Conflict split his head, and the boat ran on.

The barque loomed up before them, and they saw two young sailors on board who came quickly to the deck-rail to watch their approach. Blond, pink lads they were, Finns or Swedes, in blue jerseys, one wearing a white beret. Martin could see no other sailors and guessed that these two were on anchor watch, and the rest below. Both youngsters grinned and waved as the boat came near, and called out, '*Hej, hej, god dag. God dag.*' Martin and Helga waved back and called 'Good day.' They sailed their boat round the far side of the barque, and the two sailors rushed across the deck to see more of them. 'Gude day' they shouted, attempting English. 'Please to meet you. England ver gude. Yah.'

'Don't you know any Finnish or Swedish?' Martin asked of Helga. 'Surely you ought to. Your ancestors were Scandinavian.'

'Good gracious, no!' laughed Helga. 'Only *Hur mår du?* How are you.'

Martin called this out, and they thought it extremely funny and shouted back, 'Vine, thank you' and 'God bless.'

He remembered one Swedish word and, lifting a hand as if toasting guests, said, '*Skål!*'

They grinned and, lifting empty hands too, replied with what they supposed to be English equivalents, 'Cheeree Oh,' and 'Here's how!' And as Martin turned the nose of his boat out to sea, he called 'So long!' and they answered, '*Hej sa lange,*' and '*Adjo.*'

After this minute of miserable gaiety Martin's heart sank back into misery undiluted and conflict. But he did think, 'They will say that we were merry as we passed them and made for the open sea.' Never once in all this conflict was he seriously troubled by the doubt, 'Will anyone suspect it was no accident but a thing deliberately done?'

On and on they went towards the deep sea, stippled with light. The wind was much fresher now, either because they were far out or because it was mounting. It had shifted round to the west and was now on their beam. With the sheets eased off and both mainsail and jib full of wind, the boat was moving fast. The barque receded and diminished, and the shore seemed very far away and everything on it very small. Was that the last he would see of the little human world on the edges of these great sea wastes? The world he had resolved to conquer, and had conquered. That task, if ever it had been worth attempting,

was done long since, and could well be left behind. Nothing else in that world for him, nothing else without Helga.

'If Andrew's eyes are on us now, he must be watching us with some anxiety. Maybe he is drawing Arthur's eyes to us. Must it be soon? Can I do it?' He scanned the whole surface of the waters. Anyone near enough to see? Anyone who could watch? Not a sail. Some skiffs near shore and pier. Must one be quick and use this favourable time? He looked down into the water. Why, Helga—oh God, yes—Helga was looking down into it too. It was translucent as green glass, and far down he could see patches of deeper green and purple. Rocks perhaps, or the sea bed? That chart on the hotel wall. He saw it again with its mapped sea freckled all over with little numbers. If they were two miles out there must be eight—ten—fathoms beneath them. Soon? Yes, he supposed so. But his hand seemed inhibited, and his will in a catalepsy.

Could he not do it then? Must he abandon it? Must he give in?

'I do not give in.'

'I cannot, I will not leave her to him. And I cannot kill her and stay alive. I will do it, then; I will do it.'

So he went on, in search of yet stronger winds. The seas smacked and spat upon the boat's stern; one little sea after another slapping the transom as if to splash aboard; wave after wave lifting the little boat and leaving her to drop back into a trough; her wake a trail of foam.

'How lovely it all is,' said Helga, looking down the white wake.

'Yes . . .' he asserted, absent-mindedly. 'Nothing like sailing . . .' while his thought ran feebly, 'I am sorry, my dear, but . . .' and as he looked at her, sitting there, gazing over the sea towards the ever lessening land, it was with a sickness that he told himself, 'She is at my mercy . . . at my mercy.'

'We are a very long way out now,' she said.

'Yes, we'll turn and sail into the wind.' He hauled in the main sheet as he spoke. Instantly the peace of a running boat was exchanged for the fight and flurry of a boat heading into the wind. She was meeting the wavelets now, and they broke on her bows, flinging spray like the spittle of a galloping horse.

'Didn't old Andrew say it would be dangerous, sailing to windward?' Helga asked.

'It is always dangerous, sailing a little boat to windward, unless you know how to do it. But it's simple enough really.'

All you have to do, if there's an extra strong gust, is to let everything go. Any boat'll look after herself, if you'll leave her to it. Look, she's fetching closer and closer to the wind. A fine yacht'll sail four points to the wind, but I can't quite get this old tub to do that.'

Talking, talking. Postponing, postponing, because of an inhibited hand, a paralysed will. His body trembling to its finger tips. Must he go on like this for ever? Since he would not turn back?

'She handles beautifully. Like a bicycle coasting down hill. Now we'll turn round on to the other tack. Ready about! Look out, darling!' (Did one say 'Darling' a minute before—?) 'She'll come across.' He put the helm down, eased the boat round, and the boom swung across. Without halting or great hesitation the boat turned on to the starboard tack. She was now heading out to sea again. They were very far out now on the empty sea.

He would do it on this tack, he thought. He would not go about again. On this tack. This tack. This tack.

But how could one? Not a little thing. Not easy to do.

And so—further—further—and nothing done. The boat ran on with them, like Time speeding heedlessly on; and he did nothing . . . nothing.

Not like this. Not like this. Going on for ever. One must act, or forgo. Rather than forgo, he stirred up passion by recalling the lovely child of Hagen Street and the young woman on the printing-house stair, by picturing her body possessed by Berl and, most unbearable of all, Helga enjoying that possession. Oh no! Never that. Well, do it, do it, and be damned to all. Christ, do it, I tell you! And, still not quite knowing what would happen, or what he wanted to happen—madly experimenting rather than willing an end—he turned the boat off the wind, so that all the wind's thrust was on the mainsail, and, instead of 'letting all things go', held tiller and mainsheet fast. The boat went over.

§

Martin gasped as the water, icily cold, went over him. He struggled for the surface, but something was holding him down—almost like a hand keeping his head under water.

Some hand of Judgment?—no, no, the mainsail—the main-sail partly submerged and weighted with water. Madly he tried to swim from under it, but found himself hitched up with stays or main sheet—or both. Panic now, a claustrophobic horror, as he struggled to get free; relief, breathless relief, as he succeeded and rose to the surface. He had forgotten that he'd intended to sink and die. Or he had found that it was impossible to sink if you could swim enough to get to the surface again: one's body and its instincts would not suffer it. Still gasping, he looked about him. The boat was close to him. She and her drifting oars were moving slowly together along the tide. Her sail was a lake of water; her mast was tilted below the surface; and he could see her centreboard. Desperately he swam towards her and, getting to the gunwale, held on to it. One impotent effort told him it was impossible to right her.

He had forgotten the existence of Helga.

He remembered her. Helga: where was Helga? Nowhere. Oh God, nowhere. Then her head rising, and her arms in frantic struggle, not ten yards away! A choking sound from her, and a gasped cry—a cry that must haunt him for ever—‘Martin, Martin.’

‘Helga, my beloved!’—he left the gunwale and swam towards her as she sank again. He turned his head down to go after her. He forced himself down below the water but, hampered by his soaked clothes and waterlogged shoes, he could not get to her; he could not even see her; and, unable to hold his breath any more, seized by that claustrophobic horror, he came, perforce and desperately, to the surface again. He swam to the boat, clung to it, and looked round. No sign of Helga now, on the empty sea. He left the boat, swam towards the place where he had seen her—but—those soaked clothes, those waterlogged shoes, they were dragging him down; his mind’s eye saw that chart on the hotel wall and the figures on its mapped sea, and panic seized him again. Ten, twenty, fathoms beneath him, and he but an unpractised swimmer. There was no-saving Helga. Even if he could reach her, she would clutch him in a death-hold, and both would go down. His heart drummed as he feared that, even now, he was weakening and might sink. He turned and swam in panic to the boat. It seemed that he got to it only just in time: breath and strength were almost gone as he grasped the gunwale.

He did not look Helga’s way again.

It is done. Extraordinary that one can feel no more. Only this numbness, this deadness. As if an anaesthesia could be given to all feeling, even though one's brain continued to pulse. Immune from regret; immune from pity; just thinking. That child, that child of promise, playing so happily in Hagen Street. So unaware that she was beautiful enough to win the world; just shouting excitedly at play. And now? Is it over for you, Helga? That moment of agony, it didn't last long, did it? It has stopped now, and there is no more pain. Not now. Asleep, child, are you; asleep?

That beautiful young woman, coming down the broad stone stairs of the Marcus Press, and smiling to greet him. To him she had come; to this she had come. What have I done, Helga? I have done that. And I can feel nothing, but only think about it.

Yet was there not one emotion faintly astir: a sense of triumph, even of exaltation? Berl will never have her. No man will ever have her. She was mine.

And an excitement—not a disgust and certainly not a pride—just a curious excitement to think that he was now among the world's murderers. Why did this give a small dim pleasure to some dark deeps in him? Never once, to disturb this secret knowledge, came the thought that someone might suspect a murder.

But now, as his body chilled and his fingers turned numb and dead, came fear again; gasping panic; terror, not of death, but of the moments before death, of sinking below the water, unable to breathe and heart and lungs bursting. How long could one hold on like this? No boat near; not a quick-moving sail anywhere; only, miles away near the shore, a few skiffs and canoes and catamarans of people at play. On the distant barque no sign that they had seen an accident. Would he be seen and saved? Old Andrew must have been watching anxiously: any sign of him on that far-off shore putting out with Arthur?

None. Nowhere an eye to see him. Nowhere an ear to hear if he shouted. But he did shout. And no one heard. No one answered.

Would these deadened fingers let go soon? Now?—was he going now? Passionately he clambered on to the hull's side and got his feet on to the upturned centreboard, and so lay. But how long would a capsized dinghy float?

'Why not let go and sink? You wanted to sink. Sink now

and go down to Helga. But you can't, you can't. That awful moment with lips tight and lungs bursting—but you gave it to her—no, don't think of that. Fight out of that and back into the anaesthesia, as you fought out of the deep water.

'But you are going to have that last agony too. No one is coming to help you. Your numbed hands will lose their grip, or the boat will sink beneath you.' He shut his eyes, and opened them again, to see only a wilderness of waters and some sea birds flying low and harshly screaming, but not because they had taken note of him. He looked towards the distant world of his human kind, and saw it with the vision of the dying: a place where no men knew why they were there, or what their life was about, or where they were going—if anywhere but into nothing—when it was time to die. Martin had no desire to go back to that distant world, where Helga would be no more, but if he did not sink, what else could he do? And he could not, or would not, pass through that agonizing doorway into death.

But perhaps he would be forced through it when his hands could grip no more—

A report like a cannon's: a maroon exploding in the sky. His eyes, swinging to the sound, saw green stars falling in the sky.

Could this—could it be the signal, the summons, from the lifeboat station? There was a lifeboat station at West Sungbourne.

A second maroon; more stars falling. Had someone seen him? The barque perhaps? A coastguard? People ashore? Yes, the maroons had awakened all the pleasure-craft on the water. Even from this distance he could see that one and all were turning their heads and making towards him. But they were only rowing boats and would take half an hour to reach him. Could he last that while? Supposing they couldn't reach him in time? Hold on and hope. That faster boat, was it perhaps, old Andrew's? He and Arthur, his son, old hands, would come faster than any others. But would they come fast enough? The fastest of them was but crawling, from here.

But see: the lifeboat! Motor-driven, and racing towards him. Overtaking all the other rescuers, easily, easily. Only hold on now; dead fingers, hold; and nothing could stop one being saved. How a man's heart leapt with an impersonal pride to see rescuers racing to save! Firemen, an ambulance,

a rescue team climbing to the avalanche snow, but perhaps most thrilling of all, a lifeboat racing down the slipway and out to sea. Flashing white and blue as it rolled forward, with its red fender banding it. Flying over the sea like a messenger bird, carrying life. What a thrill this must be to the crowding watchers on the shore. Ten thousand people, perhaps, standing motionless, because stilled into rapt watchers. Every window for mile upon mile gathering its spectators. And the row-boats which had the advantage of being able to approach the scene—how excitedly they came, hastening in the lifeboat's wake, the stronger-manned racing the weaker.

The lifeboat was close now. This boat accustomed to going out to great disabled and tossing vessels, here it was: come for a single man clinging to a twelve-foot dinghy. Martin could see its crew now, six or eight of them. All wore their life-belts; none, in this fine sunny noonday, their oilskins and sou'westers. Fishermen or longshoremen, summoned from their trades to service, from getting to giving, they wore their common cloth caps of every day. Only the man at the wheel wore an R.N.L.I. cap, pushed back on his head. The coxswain, no doubt. Other men were getting their gear ship-shape and ready for instant use. One man near the bows yelled out cheerily, 'All right, mate. Here we are. Hang on, son, but what the hell you been up to?'

'I had a friend with me,' he called. 'Look for her. Look for her. Never mind me.'

'Christ! How long you been over?'

'I don't know. Half an hour perhaps.'

The man said no more. The helmsman brought his boat alongside the overturned craft. Martin caught hold of the life lines looped around the lifeboat's hull, and two of the men, leaning over the gunwale, dragged him aboard.

They wrapped oilskins around him and bade him 'take a swig' from a bottle; and, meanwhile, instructed by him, coxswain and crew made a search round the area where Helga had last been seen, and down the current of the tide. But since there could be no real hope, the coxswain at length gave the order to call the search off; and they abandoned Helga and bore Martin back to the world.

§

'Well, the deed is done,' said Dr. Shelley. 'Shall we pause there for tonight?' He turned towards the windows, whose curtains were not drawn. 'It's quite dark now. One can hardly see the mountains. What is the time? It must be very late. It's always late when you can hear no sound outside except the running of the beck. And there's no sound in the hotel: everyone but us must have gone to bed.'

'It is half-past eleven,' said Sir Robert.

'Is it? Is it indeed? And the fire will soon be out. Then I think we will certainly all go to bed and hear the rest another day.'

'Oh no!' Sadie protested. 'Go on. You can't tantalize us like that. You can't leave the issue in the air. Obviously the murder was never found out, or you'd never have met Martin Herriot roaming in freedom about the mountains.'

'No, it was never found out, Sadie. Martin was never pursued, never arrested, never arraigned—at least not by Man.'

'By whom then?' persisted Sadie. But Dr. Shelley said only, 'This would have been no private story of mine, if it had ever been uncovered to men.'

'I agree with the child,' said Sir Robert. 'You must go on and tell us the end. Half-past eleven is no time at all.'

'Very well then; if you will. I think I can finish tonight. And it is midnight stuff, perhaps.'

He added logs to the fire, waited for their edges to break into flame, and then, leaning back in his chair, took up the last of his tale. The noise of the running beck had become audible to me when he mentioned it, but now, directly he began to speak, it died away.

§

That anaesthesia, that numbness of feeling, came ashore with Martin and remained with him many days. For a long time his brain would stand still before he could complete the realization of what he had done and, in consequence, his heart was unable fully to feel.

The sea never gave up Helga's body. Now this, while not unheard of, is rare if the capsizing and the drowning were only a mile or two out at sea. And because it was strange and rare it sometimes troubled Martin. He liked to think himself too

hard-headed for superstition, but he was not above wondering if the God whom he either disbelieved in or defied had looked down upon that act in the sea's solitudes and arrested the normal courses of nature for some waiting purpose of His own.

There was an inquest at Sungbourne, the Coroner 'having reason to believe that a death had occurred in or near the area over which he had jurisdiction.' It was a brief and formal affair: the Coroner sat without a jury and brought in a verdict of Accidental Death. He had no blame for Martin, but rather praise. Being much as other men, he was not displeased to have as his witness, and under his authority, a man whose name was 'News' because of his great benefactions, and to speak good words of, and to, such a man. Always he had enjoyed his hours of brief authority, but this hour at Sungbourne was one of the best hours of all. 'I cannot feel,' he said in his summing up, 'that any blame attaches to Mr. Herriot for this most unfortunate disaster, nor that he failed to do all he could to save his companion. It must have been a terrible experience for him and is bound to remain a terrible memory. Human nature being what it is, he will probably continue to blame himself for this accident with its fatal termination, so I am glad to be able to record that this court, after hearing all the evidence, entirely exonerates him. On behalf of us all I offer him our sympathy. It only remains for me to record the following verdict: that Helga Gwenda Lindgren came to her death from asphyxia by drowning, sustained on the last day of August in this year, and that such drowning was due to the capsizing of a sailing boat some two miles off the coast of Sussex. And I do further say that the cause of her death was accidental.'

That was the only public action ever taken in the matter of Helga Lindgren's death.

The Coroner was not alone in giving praise to Martin. The newspapers had not failed to observe that the Sungbourne lifeboat had gone to the rescue of a man who'd given large sums in the past to the Royal National Lifeboat Institution. This made too good a story, and for a day and a half they wrote of Martin as a great philanthropist who lived in the simplest fashion and gave away most of his vast wealth in charity.

With the passing of weeks and months the anaesthesia wore away. Now, when he remembered that cry, 'Martin, Martin!' the pain in his heart was sharper than a twisted knife. And the pain, once started, would stay there so that he would get up

from desk or chair and cry to it, ‘Stop! Oh, stop!’ It might stop a little as he quickly addressed himself to other business, but it would return—and return in power. No, there was no obliterating, try as he would, the memory of that cry; and it seemed therefore that he was done with serenity, done with all hope of happiness, done with anything but sadness for evermore.

Now, as this pain was clearly rooted in pity, we can say, I think, that what little was good in his love for Helga was working its way with him. A benevolent, not a malignant growth, however painful, it was slowly spreading. It made of him a quiet, brooding man who could pretend to gaiety in the presence of others, but who preferred always to be alone with his cloaked and shadowed thoughts.

These thoughts were those of a bewildered and disillusioned man; and the curious thing in his history is that this disillusionment was not that of a man who’d lost his faith in good, but of one who’d lost his faith in evil. Now he could believe no more in utter selfishness, but he could not, or would not, believe in good. In spite of a torturing memory he was unwilling to deny and betray that revelation in his underground room, to retreat from his choice there, and to affirm that good was good if it preached self-sacrifice. Sometimes he thought he’d like to break down in complete repentance, but the resistance within him to so great a reversal seemed invincible. He was like that Esau in the Bible who could find no place of repentance, though he sought it carefully and with tears.

But, I suggest to you, there *was* a rock on which he was slowly being broken, and it was his love of Helga; or, if I am to be more precise, it was that element in his love which was good.

Terrible were the dreams this love gave him when, after tossing for hours on his bed, he dropped asleep. It showed him Helga as a child at play, Helga as a young woman in the pride of her beauty, Helga gazing sadly into his eyes—and then he would cry out to her in his dream, ‘Have some mercy on me,’ and ‘Let me be,’ and ‘Enough, enough!’ Sometimes he cried out so loud that Daniel came knocking at his door to ask if all was well.

Save for one mad time, of which I will tell you, he never went near the sea again. When he wanted rest and solitude he went to the mountains. To our mountains here. It was Daniel Deakin, the sole friend he cared about, who told him of these mountains and suggested that he should take a holiday among

them. Daniel told him how, in the days of his youth, when he was in fair employment in his Yorkshire mill-town he would escape from its sullen streets and soot-black buildings, its belching chimneys and monstrous smouldering slag-mountains, to nature's real mountains just over the moors to the west. Aye, there was a train that took one over and under the moors to yon Cumberland. 'Damn it, Martin lad,' he laughed, 'but Ah've bin happier theer nor anywhere else, and that's God's truth. Eh, aye, Ah used to walk alone on tops and let t'wind blaw all me troobles away. What Ah allus says is, You can't prevent yer dark thoughts coomin' any more nor you can prevent a sparrer droppin' its turds on yer head, but you can let the breeze on t'mountain tops sweep 'em all awa'.'

So Martin came to the mountains. He came a first time and stayed, if you will believe it, in this very hotel. Perhaps he slept in the room where I sleep now, or in yours, Sadie; and certainly he once sat by this fire. It was on this first visit that he acquired a love of the mountains and of wandering alone on them. They were the only things on God's earth, or the Devil's, he said, for which he could feel a real love.

You and I know how love of the mountains can take on an emotional tone that passes the understanding of more level-headed people, but he surely had stronger reasons than any we can urge to love high solitudes where he could be alone with a face of nature that was gentle at times and stern at times, and where he could breast the fitful and lonely elements that had no knowledge of man. He took to coming regularly, staying in farms and inns, and climbing alone to the ridges and peaks where (as he put it) he found 'something near to peace in the desolations above the human line.'

His heart had long ago gone out of his business. Sometimes he even found himself disliking the grossness of his profit-making. So much had that secret, irrepressible pity worked in him; for pity, if akin to love, is also a poor struggling parent of good. The light of his Omar Galleries dimmed and went out for him. He became a ceaseless smoker. He who for a long time had 'had no vices', who neither smoked nor drank nor cared much for women, now became a pipe-smoking addict. His papers unread, his books unopened, he gave himself to long pipe-dreams in his chair, with a hand around the bowl of his pipe and his feet on a footstool. Always these dreams, these private

and unspied pictures, were of Helga and himself in places where they had loved, and at times, when the memory was very vivid, she would seem so close to him that he would address her aloud, ‘Helga, are you there? Helga, come close to me;’ and ‘Helga, my beloved.’

Inevitably the dream pictures would fade into the seashore at Sungbourne, and then he would cry, ‘NO!’ and leap up and walk about, or pick up a paper, a letter, a book—anything, to arrest the procession of his thoughts. Once, and once only, the mounting impulse of these thoughts drove him to a wild action: he got into his car and drove at speed, before the wild fancy could collapse into sense, to Sungbourne, where he hired a boat and rowed out and out till he was at, or somewhere near, the place of that off-shore deed. Here he rested on his oars, bowed over them, and thinking. Every now and then he said, ‘Helga . . . Helga, my dear, I am near.’ A half-hour of this foolish and futile drifting and he dipped his oars with a sigh into the water and rowed wretchedly back into life again.

§

And Berl? Berl had come once to Martin after Helga’s death to hear his story, but never again. Nor since then had he written or in any way communicated with Martin. He had gone from Martin’s ken as once before he had disappeared out of Helga’s life. Why was this? Martin could only suppose that Berl kept away from him to avoid a great pain, just as he himself kept away from Berl because his presence would stir too awful a memory.

Sometimes, sitting in his chair and holding the bowl of his pipe, he would make an effort to realize what Berl’s pain had been, but always he found this difficult because the effort would be overlaid by a thought like a millstone, ‘How could I have stood his having her?’ Perhaps we may say that, while it was an impulse of his heart to pity Helga, it was an effort of his reason to pity Berl.

And then on Helga’s birthday, fully five years after her death, he stood by his high window in Park Gate Terrace, looking down on the glades and lawns of the Park which were chequered with sunlight and shadow—he was looking out, as it were, on Helga’s birthday which he could not enjoy—and suddenly he saw on the broad walk leading to the park gates an approaching

figure that was surely Berl's. If it was, then Berl was almost certainly coming to see him. Yes, Berl beyond doubt: that was his too-small figure and his heavy-featured face; but how grey he had become. Now he was crossing the road to the steps of this house.

And Martin felt a great apprehension. What was this? What did Berl want of him? A nameless fear, this, since Berl could know nothing of what had happened out at sea. But did Berl hate the sight of him because of that accident which had lost him Helga on the very eve of their lifelong happiness together? Was this what his long silence had meant? Martin drew back from the window, dreading the meeting. He could only strengthen himself to face Berl, that tormentor, by telling himself, 'All things pass. This will pass. An hour hence and he will have gone, and all will be as it is now.'

The bell. Daniel's voice. Berl's voice. And Daniel coming in. 'Eh, Martin lad, who do you think it is? It's Berl. You mind Berl Mickiewicz, don't you? He used to work at Galleries. Coom in, Berl. Ee, tha's bin gone a long time. Wheer've you bin? Ah thowt you wur dead; eye, Ah did, an' all. Ah wud say to t'missus, It's a pity Berl's dead. He wur quite a good 'un, wur that Berl. Ah've seen mony worse.'

'Yes, it's been a long time, Daniel,' said Berl. 'Five years, isn't it?'

'Aye, all o'that. And nah you've coom, get Martin out o' hisseln. *You* try; Ah can't. He's allus in a daze. We know what causes it, o'course, but Ah tell him, it's five years nah, and time he got ower it. You tell him so too. He'll happen listen to you.'

'Sit down, Berl,' said Martin. 'It's good to see you, even if you have neglected us shamefully. Daniel, make us some tea.'

'Ah doubt he doan't deserve it,' Daniel declared to the door, as he went out, 'but theer y'are: one mun forgive.'

Berl who had sat down said, 'Daniel's right.'

For a second the words frightened Martin. 'How do you mean: right?'

'It's five years and more since I came to see you, and I ought to have come long ago.'

'Yes, it's a long time.' Martin, still standing, quickly left the subject and asked about Berl's parents, about his work, about Stepney and the old familiar streets; and then hastened

to speak of old days at school and of their times of unemployment—of anything that would prevent him mentioning Helga. Occasionally his glance encountered Berl's and flung away. So might a hand fly from something that had burned it. Berl told me that his face that day was the face of a sufferer held still and calm by an unsparing will.

To avoid hurting him with his glance, Berl looked away towards the window and the bright sky. ‘It is Lindy’s birthday today,’ he said.

‘I know. I was thinking of that as you came in.’

‘I have been thinking about it all day. And about you.’

Martin came and sat down opposite him. ‘Are you able to feel happier now, Berl?’

Berl shrugged. ‘The worst of wounds heal up in time.’

‘Do they?’ asked Martin, as if he could find no reason to believe this.

‘Yes, slowly. I can bear to think of her now. Do you know: I often feel her very near me.’

‘So do I. Or I imagine I do. Berl, I’ve sometimes felt that you’ve kept away all this time because you couldn’t bring yourself to forgive me for that accident. Was that so?’

‘It was so at first, yes. But I got better of that, after a time. As old Daniel said, One must forgive.’

‘Yes, I remember you used to believe in forgiving everything. An impossible doctrine, it always seemed to me. Why should one forgive?’

‘Ah, many reasons,’ Berl affirmed with a smile. ‘One reason surely is that in time one comes to believe in not judging others, since judgment is impossible by man, because he cannot know all the facts—ever.’

‘But that’s nonsense, Berl. One must have judgment among men. There must be justice.’

‘Some very rough justice, yes,’ Berl admitted.

Martin rose and went to the window again, while Berl added with a small laugh, ‘And then, of course, one tries to remember a few of one’s own sins.’ Martin looked from the window in silence and after a little returned to his chair opposite Berl’s. ‘Tell me, Berl,’ he said; ‘if a man came to you and confessed to a murder—I mean a real, premeditated murder—what would you do?’

‘Do you mean a murder that the police were inquiring into or one that nobody’s ever suspected?’

'Let us say one that nobody's suspected. Because—well, because that makes the question simpler. What would you do?

'Nothing.'

'Nothing? Do you *mean* that?'

'Nothing in the way of reporting the matter to the police. Naturally one would try to be of some help to the man.'

'And that is really all you would do?'

'Yes.'

'Why do you say that? Why no more?'

'Because the confession would be some proof of penitence.'

'Oh no, Berly, that won't do. Not in every case. Say it was someone very near to you whom he'd killed. Your child—your only child, perhaps—or your wife.'

'And you mean that the man confessed to me because I was the father—or the husband?'

Martin nodded. 'If you like.'

'Then I think that, more than ever, I should try to be loyal to what little I see, and should struggle hard to forgive him.'

'Yes, that is Christianity at its extremest—or at its most extravagant, as some might say. But, forgive me, Berl, you're not a Christian, you are a Jew.'

'The founder of Christianity was a Jew too. And, as my mother and father used to say, we are proud of him.'

That put a long silence between them; and in that silence Martin perceived that he could not halt the subject here. He had gone too far. He had said words on which Berl must ponder till at last he might come to suspect. Besides, because of the pleasing, soft and velvety aura, at once potent and gentle, that seemed to surround Berl—and indeed many others of his race who were loving and kind and gentle-voiced—he now *wanted* to say more. Sitting in his chair in front of Berl, with e'bows on his knees, he told Berl the truth of that 'accident', softening it perhaps a little because it seemed so vile when spoken aloud to one like Berl. 'My idea was that we should die together. I tried to kill us both. But, try as I would, I could not sink.'

Berl, who had shown not one glimmer of surprise as Martin spoke, looked straight into his eyes. 'It was more than that, Martin,' he said, shaking his head. 'In your heart of hearts you were determined that she should die rather than come to me, but you had no such absolute need to kill yourself. And therefore you did not die.'

These words, so unexpected, were like a shot across Martin's face. 'What are you saying, Berl?'

'I have known all along that you did this.'

'How? How could you have known?'

'I think it fair to say that I have known it from the beginning. Think what I knew. I knew from Lindy of your outburst of fury at her loss. It was like a paroxysm, she said. Then there was something too prompt and deliberate in your taking of her to the sea. It was within only a few days of your fury. I had consented at first, believing in your mask of acceptance and goodwill, but then I began to wonder and doubt—though I couldn't believe in my doubts. But the day after she'd gone away with you I spent a morning of racking misgivings and fears—I was on the point of following you both—and then in the late afternoon I heard. It was in every paper. I did not come to you at once because I had no proof, no certainty, though I was certain in my own mind. I must wait, I told myself; wait till I knew more. I was there at the inquest, though you didn't see me, and I knew you were not telling the whole truth. I knew more about you than any of them. To them you were a great and famous figure, well known for your munificent charities; to me you were the lad who walked the gutters with me, carrying sandwich boards on your back. I remembered you moreso and sullen and gloomy in your basement room. I remembered old arguments of yours along the streets, when you used to say that only little men were afraid of killing and that all those who'd got themselves above the Law never hesitated. And have you forgotten: once or twice in the old days we sailed together, and I knew you were too good a sailor to upset a boat in a moderate sea.'

'Berl, you have known, or suspected, this all these years and yet you have said nothing?'

'No.'

'But I don't understand. Why?'

'Because I saw you at the inquest, and you looked to me like a broken man.'

'Did I look so?'

'Yes, if ever I have seen a sufferer's face, it was yours. It stirred the Coroner to pity, you remember.'

'Ha!' This was almost a snort of contempt for the foolishness of that well-meaning man. He got up and, walking to the window, looked out at the people on the sunlit lawns of the

Park. ‘ You suggest that I didn’t really want to die. That may be; I no longer know the truth of what I felt. It seems to me now that with a large part of me I had a mind to die with her, and that I just couldn’t; but of this at least I am certain. Even though I am still alive and speaking to you, Berl, something in me died with her that day. She carried it down with her.’

‘ Yes,’ said Berl very gently. ‘ That I can believe.’

Martin continued to look down on the people strolling over the grass below or sitting on their green park chairs in pleasant converse, and laughing. How many, he thought as their voices and their laughs came up to him, would have believed that up here behind this window two men, a caller and the man who murdered his beloved, were talking as friends. ‘ Go on,’ he said. ‘ Tell me more.’

‘ I was mad—mad with you at first, suspecting what I did; knowing it. I felt like calling upon God to drop a thunderbolt on you. Think: she was on the verge of becoming a wonderful wife to me, and, not only that, she was on the verge of great and good things. And both of these you stopped; just stopped. It was devil’s work—devil’s work exactly. It was something one still can hardly think on. Or speak of.’

Martin did not move his eyes from Berl’s as he said this, but Berl saw agreement in that gaze: it was as if Martin’s eyes said, ‘ Yes—yes . . . something one dreads to think on.’

‘ Can you then wonder,’ asked Berl, ‘ that, in spite of all I wanted to believe in, I felt like lashing you with my knowledge and, if possible, sending you to your death? But always I would remember your face at the inquest, and at last it came to me that I must go into the silence to find out what to do. I came to you once, you may remember, to ask you a few questions; I was more than ever sure, when I left you, that my knowledge was right; and I went back into the silence.’

‘ The silence?’ Martin echoed, not quite understanding what he meant.

‘ Yes, and after a long time, in that silence, I seemed to hear my answer. It said—said over and over again—“ Do nothing. Wait.” It said, “ What would you gain if you revealed all you suspect, or know? Either, and most likely, you would be unable to prove anything or you’d succeed in sending him to his death, and what sort of appeal can death make to you who are always avowing that you must be done with revenge? Are you to do to him what he did to Lindy, and hustle him out of the world

before he's had time to rebuild the life which he has so plainly wrecked?" It said, "His deed was wholly evil, yes, but try not to think of him as wholly evil; only as very sick." And as I thought like this, I saw that this was the hour of perhaps my greatest temptation, and that I must stand. So I waited, doing nothing. Waited months and, in the end, years.'

Now it was Berl's turn to rise, walk to the light of the window and look out, seeing nothing.

'But this was merely to withhold my hand; it was not to forgive,' he resumed, returning to his chair. 'I could not force myself to *that*. Oh, no. Too often, since she died, I have seen Lindy's face looking from a window, or her figure coming towards me in the street, or I have heard a voice like hers. Often I have sat alone in my room thinking of her till my grief was such that, abandoning all reason, I cried out to her, "Come. Come close to me;" and then I have imagined her in the room, close to me. I have tried to believe her in the room and have spoken words to her.'

'I have done all that too, Berl.'

'I am sure you have, Martin; and with any imagination, I should have thought of that, but I could not, I just *could* not come out of my mad fury with you. Not for a long time, and then suddenly, in a single moment, I came out into forgiveness, and it was like coming out of a dark and oppressive forest into a bright and blissful day. I was happy again for the first time since Lindy's death. I am happy now, Martin. It is extraordinary how a great misery and a great anger can come to quietness at last. My prayers became happy again. I found myself praying for you both together every night: for Lindy, my beloved, wherever she was, and for Martin my friend, who must be suffering so.'

'Your *friend*?' Martin repeated the word with incredulity.

'Yes. My friend. But I couldn't face you. I still couldn't face you. It was only today when I remembered that it was Lindy's birthday, that I felt able—that I *wanted* to come—yes, wanted with all my heart to come.'

'Why should you want so much to come?'

'May I say the truth? I came because it is my faith that we are responsible, every one of us, for all those we have known and loved.'

Loved! Martin smiled bitterly at the word.

'And I came because it was brought home to me that a man

who has done what you have done must feel so terribly alone unless he knows that there is one person in the world who feels only pity.'

At the word 'pity' Martin bent his head and said nothing. It was all a proud man could do. And Berl said 'Yes, and if pity wounds you, you must accept it as punishment.'

'Berl,' said Martin, lifting his head, and rising to walk up and down, 'you spoke of me just now as your friend. Will you let me ask you this? I have never asked forgiveness of God because I do not believe in Him, but I have always believed in you, and I want to ask your forgiveness. It is the truth that I've never dared to think of the anguish I caused to you.'

'It is forgiven, Martin.'

'But is it? Or are these only words?'

'No, not words. The truth.'

'Let us put it to the test.' He stretched out his hand. 'Will you take my hand? Remember, it is the hand that deliberately held a mainsheet tight that Helga might die.' And he forced himself to add, 'Think what she suffered as she went down.'

The words hit Berl as hard as they were designed to do. He wavered. He waited and hesitated; then looked away and said, 'No, it is not the hand that killed Lindy. That was five years ago.' And he took the outstretched hand.

'My God, you're a good fellow, Berl,' Martin said, retaining his hand for a little and pressing it with something like hungry affection. 'If only half the world were as good as you, should I ever, I wonder, have wanted to despise and fight it?'

'And I like to think,' said Dr. Shelley, as he ended that very curious episode for us, 'that when Martin Herriot said those words, his citadel of defiance fell. What could the words mean but a surrender to the idea of good? Yet not "fallen", because I do not think his citadel was ever fully occupied by the forces represented by Berl. Let us then say only that its wall was breached and the enemy fighting his way in.'

§

Anyhow, continued the doctor, it was only a little while after this that Martin Herriot surprised all who knew him by suddenly retiring from business, selling all his interests, and disappearing from the knowledge of men. 'He's gone as far from us as he can,' one of the wits said. 'He's disappeared into

some northern solitude like a hermit of the Thebaid; only in his case, I'm told, he has an anchorite's cell on the top of a mountain.' Ever an uncommunicative man, he had told none of them how he had long been dreaming of these mountains, and especially of Great Barrock on which he had so often sat alone, looking down upon Inlands with its tessellated fields, its isolated steadings, and its tiny chapel hiding in a girdle of trees. If one valley more than another appealed to him it was this Vale of Inlands because it lay so quietly lapped among the mountains and was the only one that was seldom visited by any but its own dales-people. And when he heard that High Scoat Farm, the house high up at the valley's head, could be bought, he regarded this as a nod from Fortune and hesitated no more.

To his few acquaintances it all seemed mad enough, this flight when he was still in the prime of his life and the pride of his success, but he told them that he was 'sick of all the gross commercial jungle that was modern life,' and they could only shrug their shoulders and accept the odd phenomenon. Stranger things had happened before, they said; great princes and statesmen had turned monk or priest, and celebrated actresses had taken the veil and been seen of the world no more.

He came to his new home in August, and the faithful Deakins came with him, Daniel Deakin being ever ready, as we know, to 'tak things as they coom and turn his hand to owt,' and Maisie Deakin being properly trained by now to 'do owt he towd her.' August is a month which sits with its own peculiar beauty upon our mountains, and Martin, when he came, found the shoulders of the fells wearing their shawls of purple heather or their darker manes of blue-black whortleberry. And where these were not, the dead bracken, rust-red and rose, lay sprawling over the lush green of the wet grass. All the boulders of slate or volcanic rock were plushed with lichens and many were bedded in parsley fern. This upland beauty, he told me, medicined his grief a little, even though he knew he could never be wholly healed.

This was three years before I met him in the ridge, and by that time he was the familiar figure so talked about and wondered about in the tap-rooms and farm kitchens: the handsome solitary they so often saw wandering along the tops in rain and shine, through mist and snow; and not only in the daytime but often in the clear light of the moon. Sometimes in a warm July the sheep-shearers would see him watching them through the

door of their barn, and he would speak with them, perhaps, but not much. Often a shepherd, taking the ear-marked lambs up to the fells, would pass him seated on a boulder or resting against a dry-stone intake wall. As the woman in the Green Pike Inn said to me, he seemed to go out in all weathers, almost as if he liked being lashed at by rain and hail, rough wind and blown stones. ‘He always looks to me as if he were lost and didn’t quite know if he was going the right way,’ another wise woman said to me in an inn.

‘It can’t be that,’ I objected, ‘because no one knows this country better than he.’

‘Oh, I didn’t quite mean that,’ she said.

‘Well, what did you mean?’ I begged.

‘How should I know?’ she replied to this unreasonable question. ‘I think I meant that he always seems to be walking away from something, rather fast.’

I nodded, but only as if I thought this a picturesque simile.

‘And seeking something else,’ she added, ‘but he doesn’t quite know what.’

A clever woman; and, as she spoke, I pictured that lost and wandering figure and, for my part, thought of him as a man trying to work his way home. I do not believe he ever got the whole way home. The resistances within him, and the old rooted bitterness, were too strong for that, but at least, and at last, his face was turned away from evil, and his eyes scanning the mists for some different shelter wherein to rest.

§

When it was my turn to meet him, coming up the pony track, I received the impression, as I told you, of a powerful, grey, sombre man; a man of strong intellect and sad, sardonic humour. And when we took to walking together he certainly revealed a keen intelligence. I was inevitably his friend and confidant now because of my astonishing apperception of his thoughts that day on the cart-track. He sometimes asked me if I’d seen those apparitions again, but no, I never had. They remained single and inexplicable. Perhaps if you consciously await such a phenomenon, it will never come; perhaps you need to be in some kind of trance.

I come now to a day when he told me a new thing. We began the day by toiling up Bald Rake, which climbs under

Hanging Crags to Sedgestone Band and th^e last slopes of Great Head. We intended to stand upon Great Head and then come home by the ridges and the pony track—at the foot of which he would go to his hermitage at High Scoat Farm and I to my Green Pike Inn, where now I always stayed.

It was a September morning, and we had been walking the hills for months together. During this time he had given me all the terrible story I have just told you, except for those parts which Berl gave me later and the few things which Daniel Deakin and others were able to add. He had told it with the completeness of a man who is shedding a burden at last. And the result: we were fair friends. I could not but feel a regard for a man who'd honoured me with so deep a confidence, and he had got some help and easement from me. There was no Christian-name intimacy between us; he was a man far too reserved for this. I was 'Shelley' to him; and he 'Herriot' to me.

That September morning, like today, was beautiful after rain—beautiful to the eye, that is; for there was wind in the valley and a great noise of winds above us. The narrow dead-end of Inlands, under the Crags, was dark and stern, as it always is, but the tops above us were sunlit and a cream-yellow against the blue of the sky. I remember that a sun ray struck Stornup Edge-like a spear. When we reached the Band we met the wind with a vengeance, but neither of us minded this, and we stood to enjoy a great view newly vouchsafed. A russet and orange bloom lay on all the fell-breasts and blue, misty shadows loitered in every pocket, hollow, and deep defile. Forgetting his story, I proffered the thread-bare remark that such a view made life worth living, and he, though not confessing to happiness, suggested that one got nearer to it up here among the desolations and 'out of sight of the handiwork of men.'

That started both of us analysing the hunger for solitude in some men, and I suggested, as a theory, that it might be an atavistic but unconscious return to the stone-age man buried deep in us, who had to live on high ridges 'cause his flint axes could not clear the timber in the vales. But he, hardly hearing this, preferred to speak of himself (so introverted he was) rather than of dead men long ago.

'All my life,' he said, 'even before I met Helga——' he dared not look at me as he uttered that name—'I have preferred to be alone. Did I not take to the road and become a vagrant

before I was twenty? And throughout my twenty-odd years in London, I was happiest alone in my high flat with only the Deakins for friends and Helga for lover. Come: I am rather tired; let us sit by the tarn. We shall be out of the wind under those rocks.'

We sat on the slope above the dark tarn that lies, still as black glass, on this high tumbled lap of Great Head. 'Black amber,' he called it, looking down on its cold stillness; but I said, trying to be cleverer, 'Burnt amber,' because it had a brown gleam at one edge where it reflected a sun-flush on the slope.

'Behold! A peregrine falcon!' he exclaimed, looking up at a bird perched on a crag and keeping as still as a stuffed bird in a cage. But the bird, as if his voice had travelled up to it, rose and sailed high above us in slow circles. Others, unseen before, rose with it, and their coats flashed brown in the sun. 'No. Buzzards,' he said. 'Too large for kestrels. And too many.'

I learned then that he had found a new interest in studying the birds in these parts, both the birds of prey on crag and moor and the gentler birds in farmyard and field. He spoke of the curlews that would rise with a flurry from the heather or from a hollow in the slate rocks, and of the redstarts that lodged every summer in the dry walls of his garden or in the broken masonry of his byres.

I can imagine how he watched and envied them.

We left the tarn and bent our backs to the last slopes of Great Head. These, spongy at their base and steep above, put a term to all talk, whether of men or birds. I am not as young as I was, and in my selfish way I was glad to see that he had to stop even more often than I did on these ruthless steeps. But we defeated them at last and stood upon the top.

Here we really found the wind in riotous possession of the world. In its wild excitement it seemed to be crowding against itself with long roars and loud detonations; and all the time it keened. Every blade of grass bent impotently before it or swayed as it swept round. We hastened to the summit cairn and sat in its lee, looking southward towards Brandreth and Great Gable. The Gable's crown, sovereign over all the rest, was just now visited by a travelling cloud, and I, airing perhaps my little learning, declared that I understood why it was a sacred mountain of the Norsemen, and why they believed that if the mist was on it, the Gods were on it.

He said a different thing. ‘If there’s a mist on it, I’m generally reminded of Mount Pilatus by the Lake of Lucerne.’

‘Yes?’ I said—but no more.

And he inquired, ‘You know the legend of Pilatus, I suppose?’

I knew it, of course; and I had perceived at once why he should often think of it, but I did not wish him to see what I had perceived, so I merely asked, ‘Which legend?’

‘Oh, I know that Pilatus probably got its name from something quite else—from the cap of mist that rests upon its head—but the people under it will not have it so. They prefer their legend, and so do I.’

‘The legend being?’

‘That Pilate, exiled from Rome, wandered about it with his memories of a crucifixion until he flung himself into a black lake near its summit—a little tarn, I dare say, like the one we sat by just now.’

I could say nothing to this, but no doubt his thoughts were the same as mine, for he knocked out his pipe on a stone, coughed, said ‘Good lord, this infernal wind is smoking my pipe for me instead of me,’ and went on, ‘Self-exile from the world is, in the main, I suppose, an emotional proceeding, but one can find a rational justification for it too.’

‘How?’

He explained. In his case, said he, he still, when he tried to think clearly, viewed the world with the cold clear pessimism of his sleepless nights. Civilization was a cracked and broken thing and had been so ever since the cord of hope between Man and Heaven snapped and dropped among men as a useless thing. When that life-line broke, the world became a place not subject to redemption, and men, having no common faith and fatherhood, became nothing but a vast assembly of solitaries. Even the moment of fusion between a man and a woman, the only escape from solitariness, was but a momentary healing, transient and doomed.

The keening of the wind made an apt accompaniment to these melancholy words, because it might well have been the wailing of humanity’s lost soul, exiled and without hope. It was plain to me, however, that he found a certain pleasing satisfaction in this philosophy of despair, and I told him so. I argued in favour of hope and trust instead of this cosmic despair, and he willingly allowed that he’d like to reach some such trust, but could not. All was dark to him. I reminded him that faith

must always walk in darkness, that Truth must be veiled if it is to be revered, and that religion by its very nature cannot be captured by common sense, but the soil of his mind was too hardened now to accept these seminal thoughts—or so he maintained. I asked him if he had ever discussed with Berl the things that Berl believed in.

'No,' he said, 'I have never seen Berl since that time he came to visit me.' He paused and added, 'I have never been able to face him again.'

We kept silence while the wind crashed around us. It rested for a space and he seized upon the quiet to say, filling his pipe again, 'For me it will all be over very soon, and I shall be glad.'

At first I did not grasp the import of these words because the wind had been bullying me out of thought, but gradually I realized, with amazement, what he had said. 'What do you mean?' I demanded. 'For you it will all be over very soon?'

He smiled an exceedingly private smile. 'I mean that my days are numbered. Just that.'

'I do not believe it.'

'It is so.'

'You have never spoken of this before.'

'Why should I? I only tell you now because you know all about Helga and myself, and it is open to you to say, if you like, that Justice is done and I am under sentence of death.'

I evaded this judicial aspect of things, saying hastily, 'I have seldom seen a man who looks fitter than you.'

'Nevertheless my doctor says that one of these days I shall die as hypertensives die, with a sudden and quick finish.'

'But surely this is all nonsense. Could many men of fifty climb like you?'

'Perhaps that's one of the sweeter parts of hypertension. We victims of it drive at many things restlessly and breathlessly.'

'What is this hypertension you are talking about?'

'Merely a doctor's pretty word for high blood pressure. My doctor is still young enough to be proud of his medical terms. The longer they are the better for him. When he visits me I call it the Night of the Long Words. My hypertension seems to have affected my heart.'

Now, so self-centred are we that I immediately wondered if I, ten years older than he, and with a heart that panted in expostulation as I climbed, was in the same precarious condition. And I asked, 'What causes it?'

' My doctor says no one quite knows. An inherited predisposition certainly helps—and my father died when he was younger than I of some cerebral catastrophe.' (I immediately recalled, with relief, that my father died in his eighties.) ' And they're pretty sure that anxiety and conflict help to bring it on. If that is so, Lord knows I should be a good subject for it. Peace and I parted company eight years ago.'

Since I understood the allusion I dared not speak. Nor even nod.

And he said, ' If all mental rest went from me the day that Helga—if my thoughts ever since then have been working a death in me, why, devil take it, there's a poetic justice in it somewhere.' He turned to me. ' I do not believe in God, as you know—'

' Do I know it? ' I interposed with a doubting smile; but he affected not to hear.

' So I'll leave it to you,' he pursued, ' to say that I managed to deceive men, but God is not mocked.'

I certainly didn't say this; and partly because I profess no acquaintance with the working of God's mind. But something in the words made me think again that this man was working his way blindly home. Yes, I felt sure of this because when he turned his eyes towards me, to learn why I didn't speak, they were sad, and—here I must say a strange and comforting thing—his eyes when they were sad seemed the eyes of a good man.

There was a great explosion of the wind just then, which reverberated among the mountains. When the lull came I asked, ' What did the doctor say? ' with some thought, no doubt, of taking the man's advice myself.

' Oh, the usual stuff. First that I must limit my smoking and drinking. Then that I must desist from all worry, and here I nodded as if eager to oblige him, while thinking, of course, " That, my dear fellow, is easier said than done." And lastly he said, " Now I'm coming to something that'll make you really angry." I exhorted him to come to it, and he said, " This climbing. It's just about the last thing on earth you should be doing. I should like to forbid it altogether." I assured him that there was no harm in forbidding it, but that I certainly shouldn't obey. I submitted to him, as a reasonable man, that, for me, life wouldn't be worth having on those terms, and I might just as well be dead. To which he replied, " But you're not the only person to be considered." And why not, I asked.

And he answered, "If you don't owe it to yourself, you owe it to others to take reasonable care." To whom, I demanded. "Well, there are people dependent on you, I imagine," he said; and I assured him, "Not a soul in the world." So he changed it to "Well, there are people to whom you matter." And my answer was, "Not one." That rather knocked his weapons from his hands, and he could only say "Well you've had my warning. If you won't listen to me I won't answer for the consequences." I thanked him and came away without the least intention of obeying him—as you may have observed.'

'As I have observed,' I agreed.

'He couldn't know, you see, that I had a better reason for disobedience than a rejection of life on his terms; namely, that I had no great interest in living at all. I am quite ready to die. I couldn't die in the sea, but I think I'm anxious to die now. I owe a death, it seems to me.'

That is a sentence of his which I have never forgotten. I could only honour the words with silence, and it was not till he said quietly, 'It will come' that he set me free to speak.

'What will come?'

'The end. It will come quite suddenly. Well, let it. Meanwhile I climb, and, unlike Prospero, I refrain from consecrating every third thought to the grave. Have you rested enough? Shall we go homeward now?'

We rose from the lee of the cairn, and the wind, tearing across from Sedgestone Band smote us rudely. As we swung on our rucksacks before turning to go downhill, he said, 'I still wonder, Shelley, whether that extraordinary apprehension of my thoughts which enabled you for a moment to see them incarnated before you couldn't be explained by the fact that this near presence of death can sometimes give such a heightened potency to a man's mind that it becomes a transmitting instrument capable of sending its thoughts to others. You remember I was wondering something like this while I waited for Helga at the station barrier. Lord, what a wind! Let us get out of it. And if, added to the imminence of death, a man has another death-like memory in his soul, would that be enough, think you, to cause the apparitions you saw?'

As he said this, I had been taking a last look at the great view and trying to identify each of the higher summits among these tossed mountain swells, and it suddenly occurred to me to ask, 'Or could it be, I wonder, that some men, now and then,

but very rarely, have intimations of an unknown country and climate very different from this, but in which we all dwell, and in which we are closer to each other than we know? Most mystics have believed that we dwell in two worlds at once and that the frontiers can fade . . . but there it is: what's the good of theorizing? The thing happened, but how, or what it was, and whence it arose, whether in my mind or out of it, who can say? Let us go down.'

§

That was September, and a week or two later my long-promised holiday of six months among the mountains came to an end. I could not come next spring because I'd also promised myself a tour in Italy after retirement; but I came the year after and for the first time stayed at the Pavey Ark instead of the little Green Pike. An old retired man, I felt, was entitled to more comfort and (Dr. Shelley bowed to the ladies) more charming company.

I did not on my first day go to Inlands. In nineteen months my liking for Herriot had dimmed, and besides, I thought it best not to walk too far at first. Perhaps that fear of heart-trouble, which Herriot's talk had tossed into my head, remained there to disquiet me. This first day I walked about the five tops of Glaramara, and then as far as Allen Crags, to look down upon Esk Hause, which I account the heart of this beloved country.

Next morning the sun was over Brandreth, and the air was like warm milk, and I took the road to Inlands. I climbed to the Innominate Ridge and sat down at the place where I'd first encountered Herriot. Below me the Inlands valley looked the same as ever, its dry-walled fields dotted with sheep and its spring larchwoods speckled with old dark pines. In the quiet I could hear the cocks in the yards, the lambs in the pastures, and the sheep dogs on the hills. Great Barrock, as ever, reared above the valley like a wave about to break, and its sister mountain, Greenlaw, sloped down like a wave that had broken.

When I was rested, I went down the pony track and after a saunter through the valley, past the tiny church ringed with trees, I took the farm-road to Herriot's home. I felt quite excited at the prospect of showing myself on his threshold again.

My liking for him returned in power as I went up his path and saw his roof ahead. Since it was May this cart-track seemed exactly the same as when I first trod it. In the banks of its tattered hedgerows, among the ferns and nettles, were all the same flowers as two years ago: celadine and speedwell, dog-violet and primrose and harebell—just as if they'd never died.

Of course, walking up that path, I thought of my incredible vision or dream—or whatever it was—on just such a day two years since; but there appeared nothing unusual in this little lane today. The whole vale, lying in the sun between its magnificently moulded mountains, seemed to hold nothing but a still peace and a blessed safety. No irruption here from some other and unknown landscape, as yet invisible.

I stood before Herriot's door. It was shut, and in that minute I realized that I had never seen it shut before. I wondered if the household were away, but after I'd knocked with a knuckle I heard steps and Daniel Deakin's voice.

He opened the door, and there he stood, very untidy, his shirt open before his grey-haired chest and his shirt-sleeves rolled up above his hairy arms. He looked older and peered at me as if his sight were growing dim. Then he called out, 'Eh, lass, but it's ahr Dr. Shelley! He's coom back again. Nay, but this is fine. Ah'm reet glad to see thee, lad. Coom in.'

There was earth on my boots from the wet Slape track, and I waited while I knocked it off on the doorstone. 'How are you, Daniel?'

'Oh, middlin', middlin'. Ah'm not what Ah wur, happen. Getting' older ivvery day. Saam as you, Ah reckon.'

That, of course, didn't please me, but what is one to do with these Northerners who pride themselves on speaking their mind?

'And Mrs. Deakin? How is she?'

'Oh, she's champion. Women doan't wear aht as men do. They go on for ivver. What Ah says is, you can't kill 'em. But here she is. Tak a luk at her: she doan't luk nobbut twenty, eh?'

Mrs. Deakin had joined him, adjusting the neck and back of her pink blouse as she came. I could not agree with him that she hadn't changed. Two years ago she had seemed but a full-built and full-blown woman; now she was a stout and greying matron. And all in two years. The valley did not change; only its people; and they too quickly.

We greeted each other, Maisie Deakin and I, and then I asked, 'And Martin? How is he?'

‘*Martin?*’ Daniel stared. ‘ Didn’t you know? ’
‘ Know what? ’
‘ He’s bin gone above twelve months.’
‘ Gone where? ’
‘ Dead, lad, dead. Coom in. That’ll do wi’ them boots. They’re not so mucky as aw’ that.’

‘ Dead? ’
‘ Aye, died up yonder in t’heather wi’ nivver a soul beside him.’

‘ Yes, it was tragic, it was,’ said Maisie. ‘ A shame. I shall never forget it.’

‘ I knew nothing of this.’
‘ Then coom in, lad, and Ah’ll tell thee all abaht it.’

We went in together. Their kitchen was more completely the farmhouse kitchen-parlour than ever before. Ornaments were everywhere; ornaments of brass, copper, china, and silver, on sideboard, chimney piece, upright piano, and in the deep embrasure of the window. A fire glowed in the broad range on this sunny day, and we sat ourselves before it in wicker chairs softened with soiled and emaciated cushions. Maisie blew up the fire with bellows on which was painted a blacksmith standing by his anvil.

Beyond us, through a door ajar, was a bare and silent room, occupied only by the intruding sunlight: Herriot’s room.

‘ You still live here? ’ I said to them.
‘ Aye.’ Daniel in his chair nodded. ‘ He left us this hahse in his will, along wi’ a tidy spot o’ brass. All we could want, but nowt to what he left Berl for his club. Hundred thousand that wur, wurn’t it, luv? ’

‘ Yes,’ said Maisie. ‘ He was a good man.’
‘ He left a tidy lot to t’Art Schools in East London, too. For scholarships, like.’

‘ Yes, but they were different from ordinary scholarships,’ Maisie explained. ‘ Instead of being for the boys and girls who could pass all their tests, they were to be given to those who were not so much good.’ And she laughed.

‘ We quite like it here,’ said Daniel, leaning forward and gazing into his comfortable fire. ‘ Doan’t we, Maisie? ’

‘ Yes. Yes, I think so. It’s a bit lonesome sometimes. In winter especially.’

‘ Well . . . aye, that’s soa . . . but we’ve the car, you see, and Maisie drives it champion. We get into Keswick and

Cockermouth and even to Maryport for a sight o' t'sea. Aye, it's noan so bad. He done his part by us, Ah reckon. And to think that Ah wonst had to find a coat fer his back an' a free meal! Not but what Ah let Salvation Army pay for that meal, but, blimey, he's paid for them spuds and currant duff wi' thahsands in his will, so Ah reckon Ah did t'Army a good turn that day.'

' How did he die? '

' Ah'll tell you. Maisie, mak t'lad some tea. There wur one time when he wur noan too well—eh, when wur it, Maisie?—last November year. Ah went into his room, and he wur standin' oop wi' his hand pressed on his heart and looking kind o' grey. It fair shocked me. Ah towd him he mun see t'doctor, but he said, Nay, he wurn't gettin' no doctors.'

' Why? '

' Nay, Ah doan't know. Ah said, " Damn thee, lad; that's just daft," but it wurn't no good. Happen he wur flay't of 'em. Ah am, meseln. Ah'ter that he just stayed indoors for days, and that wurn't like him.'

' What do you suppose was the matter with him? '

' Doan't know. He nivver said a word to me or Maisie. But he seemed to get more and more unwillin' to see onyboby, and even to see us too often. And he wur proper irritable abaht things, though Ah could see he tried not to be irritable with us. He'd sit fer ahhs in his chair in yon room, just thinkin', not readin'. And he wur allus goin' to window and lookin' aht, ommast as if he wur expectin' some 'un to coom up path. Ah joked him abaht it wonst, sayin' " Who're you expectin', lad? " an' he tried to laugh too and said " Weel you nivver know. Dr. Shelley might coom along." Aye, he mentioned you. Ommast as if he'd just bin thinkin' of you. He wur always partial to you.'

Mrs. Deakin had now brought the teapot to the table, and as she carried the steaming kettle to it, she said, ' Yes, I didn't like the look of him at that time at all. I used to be quite nervous of going into him with the lamp of an evening. It was his silence. I wondered if he was—well, p'raps going a little strange.'

' Aye, Maisie wur proper fasht abaht him at that time.'

' Mind you,' said Maisie, taking the kettle back to the range, ' It's my opinion he never got over Miss Helga's death; never for a moment—he believed, you see——'

' Nay, lass. Dr. Shelley knows nowt abaht that.'

‘About the drowning accident, you mean?’ I interposed.
‘He told me something about it.’

Mrs. Deakin seemed glad of this because it meant that she could go on. ‘Oh, it was a shocking thing to happen to anyone. She was all the world to him, you see; and whatever the Coroner said, he blamed himself for it to the last; of that I’m certain. He just brooded and brooded over it. She was the sweetest thing, you see. It’s always been my belief that he came here to be as far from that south coast as possible, and to put all the mountains he could find between him and the sea. That’s what I’ve always believed.’

‘Aye, lass, but——’

‘But the mountains won’t shut out thought; that’s what I say; not the very highest won’t.’

‘Aye, lass, that’s reet enough, but——’ Daniel was anxious to continue his tale.

‘You can’t get away from the sea like that. That’s what I say. You bring it along with you. It’s there outside your door.’

‘Aye, all too true, but for t’Lord’s sake lemme get on. Well, he seemed to think he wur goin’ soon, because one day when Ah went in, he says as hah he’d leave us comfortable, and that we’d be aw’ reet. And he said that we wur to remember that he was grateful to us both and wished us well.’ Here Maisie took a handkerchief from her belt and brushed her left eye. ‘At that Ah says, “Why, what t’hell, Martin?” and he just says, “Ah dunno. Ah feel very tired.” But, bless you, soon ah’ter that he picked up again! Soon he wur as energetic as you like. Whenivver t’weather’d let him—and often when it shouldn’t ‘a let him—he was aht on tops—saam as ivver, except that he wur more quiet nor ivver—hardly sayin’ a word fra one day’s end to another. Then t’spring coom, and one morning’ he got ready to go aht, wi’ his heavy boots on and his rucksack and all. Ah says, “Wheer you goin’, Martin lad?” and he says, “Ah’m noan so sure. Up on to Brecken Moss, happen.” Ah asked him if he wur goin’ to mak’ a day of it, and he says, “Aye, it’s a day for gods to be aht in. Ah’ll likely go on and do the Breckenwater Ridge.” Ah mind Ah shook ma head and said, “It looks like rain to me. It’s too bright too early,” but he only answers “That woan’t trouble me. If worst cooms to worst Ah’ll go down into Breckenwater for shelter.”’

Daniel sighed. Mrs. Deakin had given us our cups and now

sat down between us to listen to an old story. Her eyes, as interested as mine, fixed on Daniel.

'Well, he sets off. Now you can get on to Brecken Moss by two ways, either by goin' along t'road over t'Hause or by climbing up through t'oak wood yonder—High Scour Wood it's called. Martin went up through t'wood: he nivver liked what he called road-work. Ah saw him go. Ah could watch him because I was aht in yard sweepin' up muk. The path up through High Scour is one of the steepest onywhere. It's cairned all the way, but it's just stones and scree among t'trees. Ah was able to see him clearly goin' up and up because t'oaks wur only just buddin' green and his figure was grey-like against the purple of the scree. I watched him till he wur above all t'trees and walking along t'top.'

'Yes, and I saw him too,' said Mrs. Deakin, 'because I was by my kitchen window at the sink. I saw him come out above the trees and go walking along the very top and I remember thinking how small he looked against the sky.'

'Aye . . . well, Ah'd bin reet enough. In t'ah'ternoon t'rain came down as it only can in these parts, and Maisie says to me, "He's nivver walkin' in this," and Ah, knowin' Martin, says, "He's likely doin' so. He allus seems to enjoy the rain and hail."

'Yes,' interrupted Maisie, 'but not when it was beating the roof in, like it was then.'

'Well, Ah says, "mebbe he's gone dahn into Breckenwater like he said he would." Ah wur sure this wur what he'd done, when he didn't come back that neet. Ah didn't worry too much because wonst or twice afoor he'd gone over Stake and down scree shoot to Dungeon Ghyll and stayed at yon hotel (happen you know it). And he could nivver tell us, you see, because he'd nivver have no phone in tis hahse. The very fact that it rained all through the night made me fair certain he wur safely in the Lake Inn at Breckenwater.'

'I was worried,' put in Maisie.

'Aye, well, women have instincts, as we all know. Like cows and dogs. But by next ah'ternoon, wi' no message and all, even Ah wur a bit fasht, and when t'rain stopped and sun coom aht, we got aht to car and drove up t'Hause to near top where there's a grass path up t'Moss. We left car and began to climb it. Maisie came with me, even though she's not partial to climbin'.'

'I'd as soon have gone up with Daniel as stayed down there,' Maisie explained. 'I can't stand the awful gloomy loneliness at the top of the pass. I like human beings around me, and the road over the Hause just gets lonelier and lonelier as you go up it, till there's nothing anywhere but sheep and dead rushes and great humps of moss.'

'All our valleys run into desolations,' I submitted to her. 'Look at the two dead ends of Inlands: sombre imprisoned solitudes, if you like.'

'Aye, and Martin liked them solitudes, if *you* don't,' said Daniel rather rudely to his wife. 'It wur solitude he loved. Ah wur thinkin' that when we wur climbin' up t'Moss. Ah'ter a time the grass path becomes earthy and stony and twists up between miles and miles of heather. The heather lays there ommast to top, and then there's only cotton grass and moss and the beginnin' of the rocks.'

'Yes, and it fairly gets me down, it's that melancholy up there,' Maisie affirmed. 'Heather's all right when it's in bloom, but, oh heaven, all the rest of the year! That awful dark green!'

'All t'saam Maisie went up through t'heather like she wur lovin' it. She wur soon a long way above me because Ah wur fair blown, and we must'a climbed to two thahsand feet an' more. And suddenly she stops. And she calls aht, "Oh, Daniel!" Ah knew then she'd seen summat. She didn't move but waited for me to come up with her—didn't you, luv? And when Ah wur at her side she said, "What's that, Daniel?" Pale as death, she was. Because, you see, away ahead there wur summat layin' on t'path wi' t'heather on either side of it. Ah didn't doubt what it wur, and Ah took Maisie's hand and we went up towards it together. Ah should know the place easily again because it's just near where t'heather gives aht, and there's a girt mossy rock by its side. Eh, it wur Martin all right.' Daniel paused to sigh. 'It wur Martin layin' face dahn on t'stones. One hand wur grasin' at t'owd heather and t'new fresh young bilberry, like as if they could save him from sinkin' . . . Lord knows wheer. He must'a bin climbin' when he fell because . . . Aye, it wur ahr Martin. . . .'

For a second or two Daniel could not go on. His thin mouth, tight-lipped indeed, moved up and down as if he were swallowing something back. But how could he hide from me what it was, when the tears were already in his eyes? Maisie, perceiving

that his speech was thus trapped and hindered, took up the story.

'Yes, I shall never forget that moment. Daniel just stood there looking down on him and saying, "Eh, lad . . . eh, lad . . ." And after a time he says to me, "I always knew he'd go and do summat like that." To comfort him I tried to suggest that all wasn't over yet, but he only said, "Nay lass, he's likely been there all night. He's wet with the rain and the dew. Wet through. Look at his rucksack even: it's fair sodden." And so it were.'

Daniel, his manhood safely in place again, nodded. 'Aye, Ah touched him and he wur cauld. T'doctor towd us he must'a died the night afoor . . . Aye, he must'a laid there all through t'rain and t'dark. I asked doctor if it'd bin an easy end for poor Martin, and he said it'd have been quick but likely not instantaneous. A minute or so of great pain, happen, and then t'finish. Eh, but Ah could wish Ah'd bin with him then. Just afoor t'finish. An' at th'end.'

His mouth shook again, but he stopped it and mastered it, and spoke quickly, to show that there was nothing so daft as softness in him. He stared into the red glow behind the fire-bars and said, 'Eh, Ah often wonder what he thought on at last minute. . . . Up there alone.'

I wondered too, but offered no surmise.

'Ah sent Maisie down to get help wi' car,' Daniel proceeded. 'And Ah stayed there sittin' at his side, not knowin' quite what to do. Ah sat there for an hour, happen. It wur queer, sittin' up there alone with Martin, except for a few birds like them he used to watch and study; and a daft butterfly flittin' around. Ah couldn't help thinkin' of the first time Ah ivver sat beside him, in the old Day Room at Salvation Army. Ah wur able to do summat for him then. Aye, he wur in a poor way then, but not so poor as now. Ah could only do one thing for him now. One o' them birds was a raven and another an old crow who'd seen him, and Ah thought that at least Ah wur keepin' them away fra' Martin.'

'Yes,' I said in understanding rather than in agreement. But how unsuitable, how profane, our thoughts can be. I remember I was wondering then what that butterfly could be, up above the two thousand contour line—a mountain ringlet, perhaps—when Daniel said, choosing for the purpose his most unamenable brogue, 'Eh, well, that wur t'end o' Martin—oop theer on

stones like an owd dead sheep. And what it's all abaht who knaws? Ah couldn't say as Ah knaws, or ivver shall. Nor onyone else neether, to ma thinkin'.'

§

I was loth to leave the story there, and I stayed with the Deakins, listening to them, till quite late that evening. It was in those hours that they gave me not a little of what I've been able to tell you tonight. When at last I came away and went homeward down the cart-road, the sun had dropped behind Long Swire Ridge, and all the valley was filled with a sunset light. You can imagine how the mountain tops in front of the sun were knife-edged silhouettes and how every tree and hummock and boulder, on the fell-breasts opposite, seemed clear and near. I remember noticing the touches of rose-tinted light on the fell-breasts of Slape and Borran. It would be twilight soon, and I hurried my steps to get over Slape before the whole of the darkness was down.

I paused only once, and that was when I was passing the tiny church within its ring of sycamores. It stands in the deep of the valley among the fields they call Chapel Fold. Seeing its round-arched windows and mossed stone roof, I bethought myself that Daniel had never said where Herriot was buried. Was it here? Here in this little square garden within its four dry-stone walls? I went in. There are not many headstones there, and mostly they are of the beautiful Honister green slate. I came upon Martin's almost at once. It was just another flat monolith but of a rock much older and less lovely: a shard of Skiddaw slate, compressed and prepared for him, deep down in some long-departed sea, five hundred million years ago. It was little different from those that flank our field-gates here or support the grikes in our intake walls. A rough and frangible stone of a dull reptilean grey, it bore only his name and the date of his death. I imagine he had consented to a headstone for the Deakins' sake, but had chosen this poor grey weathering rock because after their death he didn't want to be remembered any more.

I stood looking down at the place where he lay, beneath this splinter of ancient rock, the rock of which his Inlands valley was built, and I could only echo old Daniel's thought, 'Eh well, who knows what it's all about? And shall we ever know?'

One other thought came to me as I stood woolgathering there; a foolish fancy, no doubt, but not to be evaded, and it was this: that here, if anywhere, by the side of this mound, a certain wraith might be expected to linger; and I waited there for a little, hoping without hope, that another glimpse of her might be given me. But of course nothing happened. The whole valley, from one mountain range to the other, was possessed by the peace and stillness of the evening, and nothing alien to Inlands, even for a second, intruded upon its calm.

